

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 42

The Five Truncheon Chapters

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Hawkfang

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 1 – Hawkfang

“Exalt, who in the world is this white-robed Daolord? Why must we sacrifice everything for the sake of killing him?” One of the many Hegemons below the Exalt, a Sithe descendant, couldn’t help but ask this question. To this very day, the Sithe descendants had no idea what ‘a Daolord who has mastered an Eternal Omega Dao’ truly represented for the Sithe. In truth, the Sithe didn’t dare to tell their descendants too much either!

In the end, their descendants were native to this Chaosverse and had grown up here. Strictly speaking, it was destined for them to be unable to walk the same path together, and so they were purposefully kept in the dark regarding many things. As a result, they now felt that this was completely incomprehensible and not worth them losing their lives over!

“Right, Exalt! We had thought that killing him would be very easy, but Purgatory was defeated even after we gave it a pair of Apocalypse-class treasures. This Daolord is too powerful! Aside from the three Elder Halls, we don’t have any treasures that are superior to the ones we already sent down, but the three Elder Halls are immobile. If we want to proactively attack him, we’ll be at a huge disadvantage. Many of us will probably die.”

“We can simply keep him exiled in Purgatory and wait for his truesoul to collapse. He’ll still die, right? Why is it necessary for us to pay such an enormous price?”

“Why do we have to fight with him to the death?”

“Is such an enormous price truly worth it?” The Sithe descendants voiced their arguments, one by one. The true Sithe were silent. They knew the details behind this, but they didn’t dare to expose them! They had been ordered long ago to restrict the amount of contact between them and their descendants, for fear of their descendants learning the ‘truth’ and losing faith.

“Worth it?” The blue-haired youth, ‘Exalt Bowenya’, let out a soft sigh

from atop his throne. “Yes... I, too, feel that it isn’t worth it.” Exalt Bowenya stared downwards. “But I’ve already told you everything I can. The things I have left unsaid, I have done so because I am not permitted to! If I told you the truth, I would be violating Sithe laws and my truesoul would be annihilated.”

“All you need to know is this! Our dimension may seem large, but we are nothing more than a small part of the Sithe race and empire. This is nothing more than a small part of Sithe territory.” Exalt Bowenya waved a finger, causing an image to appear in midair of the white-robed Daolord. “As for him... he is of grave importance to the entire Sithe civilization. We have to destroy him and then capture his truesoul. This will be an enormous accomplishment for our race! Sacrificing our entire hidden dimension will be worth it, yes. Even if the sacrifice was greater, it would still be worth it.”

Everyone below fell silent. The Sithe descendants also knew that they were nothing more than a small part of the massive Sithe empire as a whole.

“If we go against our orders, our entire dimension will be punished and annihilated. All of us, including myself, will be put to death.” Exalt Bowenya’s voice was glacially cold, and the Hegemons below him all felt an invisible sense of oppression. If they tried to find a way out, the only result would be death.

“There’s no way out. We have to kill him. If we kill him, we’ll all be rewarded heavily. If we do not... we will all die! If you must blame someone, blame that Daolord for having come to our home,” Exalt Bowenya said. “Now... obey my orders.”

None of the Hegemons voiced any further complaints. The true Sithe knew that there was no way to avoid this, while the Sithe progeny all knew that shirking back meant death.

“Jonnbech,” Exalt Bowenya called out. An extremely muscular four-armed man with curly hair who was three meters tall had been standing close to the front of the throng of Hegemons. He stepped forward and said

respectfully, “Exalt.”

“Jonnbrech, it is now time for war. We are throwing everything we have into this battle against that Daolord. You have past experience with controlling an Elder Hall, and so from this day forth you shall be the controller of the ‘Iceland’ Elder Hall.”

“Understood.” Jonnbrech was a true Sithe and was second only to the Exalt in power. He had a perfect Dao-heart and was highly venerated amongst the Sithe.

“Hawksfang.” Exalt Bowenya’s gaze turned towards another man. Instantly, the entire hall began to stir. Some of the true Sithe began to frown, while others remained quite calm. Most of the Sithe progeny, however, grew excited. Hawksfang was a leader amongst the Sithe descendants and extremely powerful.

“Exalt.” Hawksfang bowed respectfully. His face was calm, and he was dressed in long black robes. His eyes seemed to contain an endless universe of space and time within them.

Exalt Bowenya couldn’t help but secretly sigh to himself when he saw this. Hawksfang was a descendant he held in high regard, and was the son of a friend. The man was extremely talented and had reached Hegemony in a very short period of time. He stood a very good chance of becoming an Autarch in the future! Even the supreme leader of the Sithe paid a great deal of attention to Hawksfang.

Alas, during the Dawn War, Hawksfang’s father (another Exalt) died in battle. Ever since then, Hawksfang seemed to have become filled with many thoughts and worries, resulting in him being unable to progress any further in his path of cultivation. The entire Sithe race sighed at the loss.

It must be remembered that if Sithe descendants became what the locals called ‘Autarchs’, then as natives to this Chaosverse they would gain full control over the power of the local Dao. An extra ‘Autarch’ on the side of the Sithe would be of enormous assistance to them.

As the supreme leader of the Sithe once said: “Hawksfang simply hasn’t experienced enough. The only place he has ever lived is that single small

dimension. The death of his father caused his heart to be filled with turmoil. He is unable to perfect his Dao-heart and he no longer has any chance of reaching Autarchy! If he had been able to spend more time wandering the universe, his father's death wouldn't have dealt such a deadly blow to his psyche. Now that a shadow has been cast over his heart, it will be very difficult for him to perfect his Dao-heart!"

He had been such a promising figure, but now he was destined to be mediocre! Still... in this dimension, Hawkfang remained the most talented member of the Sithe descendants, and he had reached Hegemony in a total of six Daos!

"Starting now, Hawkfang, you shall be in control of the same Elder Hall your father controlled – the 'Flameland' Elder Hall," Exalt Bowenya said. "Your father died a glorious death in battle for the sake of the Sithe. I hope you will prove to be as fearless as your father was and destroy this Daolord for the Sithe."

"Understood." Hawkfang remained completely expressionless as he bowed respectfully.

"Jonnbech, Hawkfang, the two of you should immediately go to your respective Elder Halls and take control over them. Once you do so, the three of us shall decide on a strategy for dealing with this Daolord," Exalt Bowenya instructed. "As for the other Hegemons, await your deployment orders."

"Understood." The throng of Hegemons and Emperors all acknowledged the order.

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The three Elder Halls were all glowing with white light. One of them was shining brighter than the other two, which were slightly dimmer. They had lain untouched for many years, after all; they were simply functioning on auto-mode.

Whoosh. The black-robed Hawkfang suddenly flew through the air, moving towards the towering, twelve-storied tower which emanated a scorching aura. When he arrived before it, he raised his head and stared

upwards, a lost look in his eyes.

“Father,” Hawktfang murmured softly. He still clearly remembered his father bringing him here when he was young. This was his father’s Daoguard Tower, and they had played together here. Life back then had been truly carefree, and he had been so incredibly talented that he had succeeded in everything he tried. His father had arranged him to experience a few setbacks to temper him, but they barely slowed him down at all. He had reached the Daomerge with incredible speed, then completed it and reached Hegemony.

“It’s been so long, but I’ve come again.” Hawktfang reached out to touch the tower. He could still remember that battle clearly.

During the Dawn War, his avatar had accompanied his father in their grand campaign. Towards the end of the war, they had fallen into dire straits. His father had personally destroyed his avatar, not wishing for his avatar to fall into the hands of their cultivator enemies. If the Autarchs managed to capture his avatar, they were completely capable of using karma to slay his true body as well! In contrast, when his father killed his avatar it would have no impact at all. Avatars didn’t matter too much to Hegemons, as they could simply remake them after they were destroyed.

In the end, his father had died during that battle. He had died at the hands of a cultivator known as ‘Autarch Bolin’.

“The cultivators...” Hawktfang mused to himself, “Am I a Sithe, or am I a cultivator?” Hawktfang shook his head. “Let us fight, then. If you can’t even stop someone like me, then you deserve to die. Even if I really am a cultivator, killing some of them in Father’s memory isn’t that big a deal.” He stepped into the tower.

“Young master.” A black golem instantly appeared on the first floor of the great tower, and it bowed respectfully: “I’ve already received orders to hand the entire Daoguard Tower over to you.”

“Mm.” Hawktfang nodded. He immediately took control over the entire Elder Hall and began to make plans to deal with the white-robed Daolord based on the various tricks and traps the hall contained.”

Chapter 2: Illusion Sword Dao

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 2 – Illusion Sword Dao

Hawkfang and Jonnbech quickly familiarized themselves with their respective Elder Halls. After doing so, they went to meet with Exalt Bowenya again. The three met within a quiet side hall and began to discuss their battle plans.

“Exalt, these are all the tools which my ‘Iceland’ Elder Hall possesses.” Jonnbech waved his hand, causing a scroll to appear. This scroll was covered with dense scribbling which recorded the various offensive techniques the Iceland Hall possessed.

“These are all the attacks which the ‘Flameland’ Elder Hall can use.” Hawkfang also produced a scroll which was covered with a complete record of what his hall could do.

Exalt Bowenya carefully inspected both the scrolls. “Huh. My old friends certainly put a great deal of countermeasures inside their Daoguard Towers.” Exalt Bowenya chuckled. “My plans for dealing with this Daolord are simple. Let’s fight him openly and use the overwhelming power over our three Daoguard Towers to fight and kill him head-on.”

“Fight and kill him head-on? How?” Jonnbech asked, while Hawkfang simply listened without saying a word.

“Simple. Our three Daoguard Towers shall use all the long-distance attacks available to us, as well as treasures that are strong enough to pose a threat to him! Everyone else will swarm him as we do so, and we’ll wipe him out at the base of the Sacred Mountains,” Exalt Bowenya said.

Both Jonnbech and Hawkfang were startled. This was an extremely vicious ploy! They had been planning on setting down layers of traps to slowly whittle away at the Daolord’s longevity until he finally died, but Exalt Bowenya had a far crueller plan in mind.

They were going to send all the Hegemons and Emperors to attack while the Daoguard Towers launched virtually all of their attacks from afar!

They would literally focus all of their firepower in one massive bombardment, using all of their tricks and traps and offensive powers at the same time. This was indeed likely to result in the Daolord's death, but the maddened Daolord would probably butcher many of the Hegemons and Emperors swarming him. However, Jonnbech and Hawkfang didn't voice any dissent. The Exalt was the final decision-maker, after all.

"What if he doesn't die at the base of the Sacred Mountains?" Hawkfang asked.

"How could he possibly survive that many attacks?" Jonnbech frowned.

"And what if he does?" Hawkfang repeated.

Bowenya smiled coldly. "Then the only things left to us shall be our respective Daoguard Towers. Even if it costs us our very lives, we have to kill him... because if we can't kill him, we will still die."

"My plan is to have 70% of the Hegemons and Emperors take part in the battle at the base of the Sacred Mountains. The remaining 30% of them will be split amongst the three of us. If it really does come down to a series of final battles involving our Daoguard Towers, we'll need their help." Bowenya chuckled. "He's nothing more than a Daolord whose truesoul is crumbling away. Our three towers should be enough to kill him."

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Exalt Bowenya gave the order, and the entire Sacred Realm sprinted into motion. An awesome number of Samsara Daolords were teleported away from it, while some of the most supremely talented Daolords were actually given a chance to take part in the fight as well! They were given Sithe weapons and would be sent out as fodder to exhaust that terrifying Daolord in battle.

Rumble... the levitating Realmgate suddenly activated, once more glowing with the same dazzling light that it had emanated for countless years. The Realmgate was a hundred thousand kilometers tall, and it radiated eye-catching splendor.

Ji Ning was seated in the lotus position on the ground. He raised his

head to glance at the distant Realmgate. “The Realmgate has been activated. However... I’m in no rush to go there just yet.” Ning then shut his eyes again, once more focusing on the Dao of Illusions.

Ever since he had learned of those nine special techniques, he had scoured the memories of all the Hegemons and Emperors he had captured. However, there had been two Hegemons who had extremely powerful Dao-hearts. Ning had been unable to successfully review their memories! Ning was planning to capture more Hegemons during this trip into the Sacred Realm. He had to improve his mastery over the art of illusions, improving it to Hegemony!

Ever since he had mastered the Eternal Omega Sword Dao, he had been able to quickly master other Daos as well. For example, he had long ago reached Hegemony in the Dao of Space and the Dao of Time. Training to Hegemony was quite simple, but fusing them into his Eternal Omega Sword Dao was fairly difficult.

As for the Dao of Illusions? Ning had yet to upgrade it to Hegemony, much less infuse it into his sword-arts.

Time continued to pass on. He was able to reach Hegemony in the Dao of Illusions after merely eighty thousand years. It could be said that Ning was now at a level where he could easily reach Hegemony in any Dao he desired, even complicated Daos such as the Dao of Numerancy or the Dao of Karma. They might take a bit more time, but he could still do it. To Ning, however, there wasn’t much of a point to doing so. These Daos were only useful when he infused them into his Eternal Omega Sword Dao.

Time continued to flow on. A hundred million years. A billion years. Ten billion years...

The Sacred Realm had finished making its preparations long ago. The Sithe were waiting for Ning... and they began to grow a bit anxious.

“Why hasn’t that Daolord come yet?”

“It has been nearly half a chaos cycle. How much longer does he plan to train for?”

“If this continues, is it possible that he’ll just naturally expire and his true soul will crumble?” The Sithe were all rather worried.

“Don’t worry. He won’t. The fact that he is still cultivating is proof that he very much wants to stay alive. He wouldn’t be willing to just train until his death.”

“Let’s keep waiting. That’s the only choice we have! He’s the only living person in all of Purgatory right now. There’s no way for us to set up any formations there, and the power of the three Elder Halls would be dramatically weakened if used in Purgatory. We used two Apocalypse-class treasures which were a perfect counter against him, but both failed. There’s no point in sending anyone else with any other treasures to Purgatory. Our only choice is to wait.”

Ning was simply too powerful. In the end, even the ‘perfect counters’ against him had failed. Their only chance was to rely on their Daoguard Towers and wait for Ning to come to them. The Daoguard Towers, however, were in the Sacred Realm! Thus, the Sithe had to remain in the Sacred Realm. They wouldn’t dare go to Purgatory!

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One chaos cycle. Two chaos cycles. Ten chaos cycles. A hundred chaos cycles...

Ning’s Primaltwin in the outside world was training as well, paying no heed to the Sithe who were being driven mad with impatience.

Finally, the day came when a small smile appeared in Ning’s face. He had been completely absorbed in cultivating for many years now, and today he finally felt the joy of finding the Dao he sought! He slowly opened his eyes, and his gaze seemed to be filled with illusions of the birth and destruction of all things in spacetime.

Boom! A strange surge of power flowed through the Sword Dao Domain around him, causing countless illusions to appear. Countless living beings were born, lived, and fought against each other. Some of them even possessed rudimentary levels of sentience. It could be said that they already had some of the qualities of actual living beings.

“I never would’ve imagined that when the Dao of Illusions came together with my Eternal Omega Sword Dao, its power would skyrocket by such a great amount. My illusions are beginning to become reality.” Ning could sense that the illusory life forms he had created were all ‘real’. They had their own sentience and even some rudimentary emotions; the only thing they lacked was a sense of self-awareness.

Ning now felt rather reluctant to bring this illusion to an end. Once he did, it would represent the annihilation of all the living beings within this illusory realm.

“So the guesses of countless cultivators who came before me were correct. If one can reach an incredibly high level in the Dao of Illusions, one truly can turn illusions into reality,” Ning mused. “If I can make another breakthrough and upgrade my Omega Dao to Autarchy, I’ll probably be able to make everything within my heartworld projection real.”

With another thought, Ning gradually cast the illusory world around him into darkness. The countless beings within that world all fell asleep... and then, the illusion came to an end.

Although he was rather unwilling to part with them, he couldn’t just spend all his time and energy maintaining that illusory realm.

“Illusions... reality... I imagine there are many cultivators who would rather live in an illusory realm.” Ning’s Illusion Sword Dao had reached such a level where many cultivators would willingly allow themselves to be captured by it, because it truly did feel extremely real. Only a tiny little bit of difference remained between it and true reality.

Ning’s truesoul was affected by the power of his Illusion Sword Dao as well. Reality and illusion intersected repeatedly, resulting in his truesoul feeling more comfortable than ever before. Even the truesoul’s crumbling speed was somewhat lessened! Ning’s mastery of the Wind Sword Dao and Lightning Sword Dao had been of negligible benefit to his truesoul, but the Illusion Sword Dao was clearly quite helpful.

“For the sake of this Illusion Sword Dao, I spent a total of 185 chaos

cycles in training! However, the Illusion Sword Dao has caused my truesoul to slow down its rate of crumbling. As a result, I still have six hundred chaos cycles left.” Ning couldn’t help but let out an involuntary chuckle. “I guess you really do win some and lose some.”

“Now that I have mastered the Illusion Sword Dao, it is time to review the memories of those two Hegemons.” Ning once more summoned the two Hegemons he had captured.

As soon as the two Hegemons looked at Ning, they instantly fell into a dazed stupor. Ning’s mastery of the Illusion Sword Dao meant only Autarch Stonerule, the master of the Illusion Daobirth Essence, was superior to him in the art of illusions... and only somewhat superior at that. The other Autarchs were all slightly inferior to Ning in this regard! And so, Ning was able to review the memories of the various Hegemons with ease.

Chapter 3: Wandering the Sacred Realm Alone

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 3 – Wandering the Sacred Realm Alone

This was another testament to how formidable the path of the Omega Dao was. Mastering the Eternal Omega Sword Dao put Ji Ning on par with the Autarchs, and as Ning infused more and more Daos into his Sword Dao, he began to improve in many other areas as well. Given enough time, he would undergo a final transformation and reach a higher level, the level which the entire cultivator civilization yearned for!

“A pity. Once again, no luck with those nine techniques.” Ning slowly shook his head. “They are all bound by lifeblood oaths. There’s no way to review those techniques at all. Can it really be possible that every single Hegemon and Emperor was bound by a lifeblood oath? Is there really no way at all?”

“No. The probability may be low, but there always is a chance. Mm. Well. Time to go to the Sacred Realm.” Ning lifted his head to stare at the towering Realmgate. It had been glowing with dazzling light for many years now.

Ning took a single step forwards and moved towards the Realmgate. After stepping inside, he entered yet another tunnel that was formed from many different folds of dimensional space. This was the dimensional passageway which led to the Sacred Realm.

This time, he didn’t suffer any attacks within the dimensional passageway. Sneak attacks had clearly proven to be useless against him, after all, and letting him die alone in exile wasn’t worth it. They had been waiting for him for many years now... waiting for him to come to the Sacred Realm.

“The Sacred Realm.” Ning stood at the exit to the tunnel, staring at the Sacred Realm around him. “Odd. I thought that this place would be quite

dangerous, that there would be many different traps and formations awaiting my arrival. Who would've thought that there'd be nothing here?" Ning was rather surprised. There was no way any ambush could escape his detection. Ning had been planning to rely on his Storm Sword Dao to flee at high speeds if he discovered any traps, but now it seemed as it was all unnecessary.

Swoosh! Ning flew away from the Realmgate and into the skies. He stared down at the vast world around him, quickly seeing the palaces and estates which were located off in the distance. Clearly, there had once been many people who had lived here. Now, the entire Sacred Realm was deathly silent. All the Daolords had been evacuated, leaving their empty estates behind.

Ning took a deep breath, and as he did so a surge of energy flowed into his body, making him feel quite comfortable. An awesome aura of power pervaded this entire place. The energy here was so dense than an entire army of Hegemons could draw upon it and use it to cultivate.

"What a truly wonderful 'Sacred Realm'," Ning said with an approving chuckle.

"Daolord." An icy void suddenly echoed in the skies above the Sacred Realm.

"Is that the Sithe Exalt?" Ning stood there in midair, a smile on his face. "I thought you'd attack me as soon as I exited the Realmgate. I didn't expect you to behave so courteously."

"I, Bowenya, have been waiting for you for many years now, Daolord," the icy void said.

"I, Darknorth, was teleported into this place by you Sithe. Heh." Ning chuckled. "Honestly, I would really rather not fight you. If you just let me go, that would be the best outcome for both of us! Otherwise, our only option is to fight each other."

Many of the Sithe descendants were moved by these words. They knew just how powerful Daolord Darknorth was, and they weren't willing to fight him. If it truly was possible for them to avoid this battle, how

wonderful it would be! However, they all knew that this was a fantasy. No one dared to disobey the orders from the supreme Sithe leader! There was no way out of this deadly battle.

“Daolord Darknorth?” The icy voice spoke out once more: “A fine name. There is no need for us to waste time on words. If you wish to leave this place, you must do so through overpowering us. Given how strong you are, I imagine you can tell where the exit path lies.”

“The exit path should lie within the Daoguard Tower in the very rear, I imagine,” Ning said. Ning was able to sense and scan the entire Sacred Realm through the power of his Wind Sword Dao, and he knew of the presence of those three Daoguard Towers.

All three Daoguard Towers had a total of twelve stories. Based on what Ning knew regarding the Sithe, this meant that these were Daoguard Towers which belonged to Sithe Exalts! There was no way they would be as easy to deal with as the Daoguard Tower he had dealt with some time ago. Ning’s acute attunement to space also allowed him to ascertain and verify that the center of the Sacred Realm, the place where all the dimensional controls were located, was within the Daoguard Tower at the very rear.

What he didn’t know was that during the Dawn War, all three Daoguard Towers shared part of the dimensional controls! After two of the Sithe Exalts died, the Daoguard Towers had been modified so that the only one which could be used to control this hidden dimension was the one which Exalt Bowenya controlled.

“Impressive, Daolord Darknorth.” The icy voice continued, “Then come and fight me, if you dare.”

“Hmph.” Ning let out an amused snort. “Be there shortly. Relax.”

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Ning began to leisurely fly through the Sacred Realm, blinking through the various regions within it and inspecting it carefully.

“Huh.” Ning stood before a mountain wall which was filled with many

carvings as well as some cultivation techniques. “Now that’s interesting.” Ning was like a tourist, wandering through the various parts of the Sacred Realm and visiting many of the sects it held.

The Hegemons and Emperors had been waiting for battle for many years now, and they all felt rather speechless at Ning’s behavior. Still... they had already managed to wait for over a hundred chaos cycles. A bit more time would make no difference at all. They could be patient.

Ning spent a total of fifteen days touring the Sacred Realm.

“A pity. I didn’t find any trace of the nine techniques I’m interested in.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh to himself. The Sacred Realm had been used to train Samsara Daolords for countless aeons. Many techniques had been recorded here, and not all of them had been destroyed during the evacuation. Ning was able to broaden his horizons by inspecting the remaining ones, but he didn’t find the ones he really needed.

Whoosh. Ning began to fly closer towards the Sacred Mountains. There were a total of three towering Daoguard Towers at the peaks of three of the mountains, and they were all glowing with dazzling light that caused spacetime to ripple around them. The effect of the light extended to a distance of a trillion kilometers, and the effect was continuous. Not even Autarch Mogg, who specialized in the Dao of Space, would be able to teleport through this region, to say nothing of Ning.

This was one of the things which made an Exalt’s Daoguard Tower so incredibly dangerous! Spacetime was completely suppressed here.

“This truly is a beautiful world. A pity that it is about to be torn apart by war,” Ning said.

“Even if it is destroyed, we can remake it in the future,” that icy voice replied.

Ning said nothing further. He drew a Northbow sword from the sheath on his back, then continued to fly forwards as he carefully inspected the area around him. “I can sense danger within every inch of the Sacred Mountains. It doesn’t matter which direction I enter from; I’ll still be facing incredible danger. I have no choice but to just charge in.”

Whoosh. Ning continued to fly forwards. Suddenly, the hills below him began to tremble and shake, followed by rippling ley-lines to appear. A massive formation that was a hundred billion kilometers in size began to activate, and it completely separated the surrounding dimension away from the normal spacetime continuum.

“The Dimensional Separator again?” Ning shook his head and laughed. An area of a hundred billion kilometers around him had been completely separated from the outside world. Ning had suffered a similar attack while rescuing the Paragon of Pills. Ning couldn’t help but sigh at how the Sithe seemed to be able to play with space, cutting through it as though it was a cake.

Ning simply stood there in the air, sword at the ready as he calmly glanced at the stand-alone dimension which had been formed around him. He was waiting for them to come to him. If he didn’t fight, how was he supposed to capture more Emperors and search for those nine techniques?

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Vile auras began to appear at the margins of this sealed spacetime continuum, and the vile auras began to come together and form vilefiends. These vilefiends were all extremely powerful, the most powerful vilefiends Ning had seen thus far. They were probably all at the Otherverse Lord level of power.

“Exalt-level Daoguard Towers are able to make use of even more of the power of the Sithe energy generator. As a result, they can give birth to vilefiends of tremendous power. Still, for them to produce a total of 105 vilefiends of such power at once... they’ve probably brought out everything they built up over the course of aeons.” Ning remained quite calm. This was all as he had inspected. These vilefiends would at most be able to slow him down a bit.

“GWAAAAR!” “KILL!” “DIE!”

Cracks began to appear in the ground at the margins of this sealed continuum, and various creatures began to fly out of those cracks. Their eyes were all dead, and they were at varying levels of power. Some had

auras comparable to Otherverse Lords, while others were noticeably more powerful. Still, they were all somewhat inferior to the likes of the Blazesun Ruler.”

“Not that strong, but there are certainly quite a lot of them. If they all attack at once, it’ll be a bit troublesome.” Ning frowned slightly. It would consume quite a bit of his energy to kill all those vilefiends as well as those poor mind-controlled living golems.

Moments later, a total of nine figures appeared around Ning.

“Eh?” Ning frowned again. “Daolords?” The nine figures were all Samsara Daolords, but all of them were unspeakably powerful.

“Daolord Darknorth, we’ll be more than enough to deal with you. You aren’t worthy of the Hegemons and Emperors dirtying their hands!” The nine Daolords all had crazed looks in their eyes. Daolords were generally fearless to begin with, and the Sithe Exalt had offered them enormous rewards for this mission. He had also given them control over many vilefiends and living golems. They naturally were going to do their absolute utmost in this battle.

Chapter 4: Successfully Surrounded

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 4 – Successfully Surrounded

Within this sealed continuum, Ji Ning's Sword Dao Domain was only able to extend up to a distance of one billion kilometers. The invisible suppressive power of the Sacred Realm was simply too strong.

"Attack! Once Daolord Darknorth's domain sweeps over us, we'll be dead," a black-winged Daolord sent mentally. Given Ning's power, even Hegemons and Emperors would fall to his domain unless they were protected by incredibly powerful treasures, to say nothing of mere Daolords. He would be able to toy with them as he pleased.

"You actually want to attack me with such a miniscule amount of power?" Ning made his move, transforming into a streak of light that flew towards the Daolord closest to him.

The nine Daolords were all separated at the margins of this sealed continuum, each in a different direction. That way, if Ning wanted to deal with them he would have to fly to them one-by-one.

"Kill!"

"Kill this Daolord!"

"Kill him!" The vilefiends and the living golems let out crazed roars as they fearlessly swarmed towards Ning, seeking to surround him. As for the nine Daolords, they immediately set up various treasures which were controlled by the power of a Daoguard Tower.

Ning's answer to this mass attack was to continue flying forwards at high speed while manifesting countless streaks of sword-light within his Sword Dao Domain. They sent the vilefiends and the living golems stumbling backwards, falling to the ground, or even go flying into the air. Only a tiny number of them were able to get close to Ning, with the majority unable to approach him.

This was why a powerful domain was so useful in battle. Ning was able to use it to toy with anyone at or below the Otherverse Lord level of power.

Clack! Clack! Clack! Strange edifices began to appear in front of the nine Daolords. They looked like miniature castles, with each being 9,900 meters tall and completely golden. Semi-translucent towers could be seen at the very top of the castles. These nine Sithe treasures were controlled by the Daoguard Tower, and they were powerful treasures which could be used to attack from afar.

The main mission for these nine Daoguards was to get in and then put these nine treasures in position. If they managed to do that, they would have succeeded in their task!

“These Daolords truly are fools.” Ning flew so incredibly fast that he was already within a billion kilometers of the first Daolord. His Sword Dao Domain instantly captured the Daolord, preventing him from moving at all.

“Get in here.” Ning didn’t attack, instead choosing to draw both the Daolord and the treasure into his estate-world, separating it from the power of the Daoguard Tower.

Riiiiiiip! Beams of dazzling, destructive energy spat out from the other eight castle towers, moving with incomprehensible speed and striking with nigh-Autarch levels of power! The attacks were incredibly powerful, but in the end they were generated by treasures. There was no way these attacks could compare with attacks from actual Autarchs in terms of profundity; they relied strictly upon overwhelming speed and power.

Swoosh! Ning used his Storm Sword Dao to evade. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! He evaded all eight destructive rays of light. By the time those eight rays of light had flown tens of billions of kilometers and reached Ning, Ning was able to brush past them and let them splatter against the distant dimensional membrane, causing it to tremble.

As for the vilefiends and living golems? The ones touched by the rays of light were instantly and easily chopped apart! However, the vilefiends and the living golems were able to quickly recover. Killing them wouldn’t be that easy.

Rumble... suddenly, yet another rift appeared at the margins of this

sealed continuum. A total of fifty-plus Hegemons and Emperors flew out from within this rift! Ning raised an eyebrow, then immediately transformed into a streak of light as he flew towards those fifty-plus Hegemons. However, as he did so another rift appeared in the distance. Another squad of fifty-plus Hegemons and Emperors appeared from this second rift as well.

“Eight of the nine treasures remain intact. Good enough.” The Hegemons began to advance. When they saw that eight of the castle towers were once more glowing with destructive light, they couldn’t help but secretly feel a sense of joy.

“This ‘Daolord Darknorth’ is nothing more than a Daolord whose truesoul is crumbling away. We have over a hundred Hegemons on our side and are supported by treasures from the Daoguard Tower. I refuse to believe we cannot kill him.”

“We’ll smash him apart with one coordinated strike. We’ll be rewarded for our victory and this calamity shall be at an end.”

“Attack!” The Hegemons and Emperors were brimming with malevolence. Whether it was because they had to obey orders, wanted to protect their home, or desired the great rewards promised, they had to kill Ning!

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! A miniature star began to appear in front of each of the hundred-plus Hegemons and Emperors. The hundred-plus miniature stars manifested runes which began to accumulate different but equally terrifying types of power.

“Flameland Astral Chains!”

“Iceland Astral Chains!”

The Hegemons began to launch their various weapons as well. The nine castle-like treasures were fixed in location and didn’t need to be controlled, but the various ‘astral chains’ were more complicated and needed to be controlled. Thus, the Sithe had sent over a hundred Hegemons and Emperors to man them. Each of the miniature stars was drawing power from the Daoguard Towers, then controlled by a Hegemon

or Emperor to launch attacks via a formation that made it hard for Ning to dodge.

Whoosh! The fifty-plus Hegemons and Emperors to the left released streams of icy energy from their miniature stars. The icy energy shot straight towards Ning like rays of frozen light, completely freezing even spacetime. The combined power of the freezing energy was absolutely at the Autarch level of power; even Autarchs would be temporarily suppressed by such an assault.

To the right, streams of fiery golden light appeared as well, joining together and shooting towards Ning at terrifying speeds.

To one side, freezing cold. To the other, blazing heat. These were two diametrically different types of energy, and each was capable of threatening even an Autarch. When used in concert, they became even more terrifyingly powerful, especially now that they came together in accordance with an incredibly profound formation. They flew towards Ning in an intricate manner, making it almost impossible for him to dodge.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! The eight streams of apocalyptic light continued to attack as well, slowing down Ning's movements.

"Hmph." Ning moved like the storm, transforming into a blurry shadow of lightning and wind. However, the 'Flameland Astral Chains' and the 'Iceland Astral Chains' being used by the Hegemons and Emperors had completely locked onto Ning, and they arced in the air as they continued their pursuit of him.

"I can't dodge them?!" A look of shock and anger appeared on Ning's face, while looks of excitement appeared on the faces of the hundred-plus Hegemons and the eight Daolords.

Whoosh! Ning hurriedly retreated backwards, wishing to draw those two terrifying types of energy together and cause them to collide.

"That fool."

"Did he think that our treasures would interfere with each other?"

“When the two astral chains link up, merging fire and ice together, the power shall only increase!” The Hegemons all smirked as they watched the freezing energy swirl together with the golden flames as both continued to shoot towards Ning. Finally, the energies began to clash together. Tink! Each collision was extremely soft, and the only result was a series of strange dimensional ripples being generated as the attacks became even more powerful.

They watched as Daolord Darknorth continued to retreat, his face ashen as he frantically used the Northbow sword in his hand to execute the Water Sword Dao. A stream of watery light circled around him, striving to block the attacks, but some of the destructive power managed to pierce through the water. Of course, this was with Daolord Darknorth doing his best to conserve his energy.

Daolord Darknorth had clearly been caught off-guard by the hundred-plus streams of energy assaulting him. He executed repeated sword-arts, striving to block as his truesoul began to crumble more quickly.

“Hahaha... the Exalt’s prediction was spot-on!”

“He might be fast, but the astral chains are a perfect counter for him. When the astral chains from the Flameland Elder Hall and the Iceland Elder Hall merge together, they are his absolute nemesis. It’ll be hard for us to kill him outright, but we’ll be able to exhaust a large amount of his energy and hasten the collapse of his truesoul.”

The Hegemons grew increasingly excited. To kill this terrifying Daolord was unrealistic; all they could do was exhaust as much of his power as was possible! Each time the Daolord defended, his lifespan would be shortened. Eventually, he would die without them needing to do a thing.

“Kill! Kill! Kill!”

“Again!” The Hegemons and Emperors were all in a wonderful mood.

Ning had gotten the worst of his first clash against them. This time, he transformed into a streak of light and shot straight towards them. Clearly, he wanted to try and capture or kill as many Hegemons as he could. If he succeeded, the astral chains would become ownerless and he could take

them away with ease.

“Daolord Darknorth, our Exalt has already predicted your every move!” The Hegemons scattered every which way, but as they flew the miniature stars flew with them, allowing them to maintain the astral chain formations.

Boom! Yet another rift appeared at the borders, resulting in thirty-five more Hegemons appearing. After they appeared, they immediately produced their own treasures and joined together into a formation. Soon, a thick black miasma began to sweep out and cover the entire sealed continuum, causing an ominous feeling to arise in Ning’s heart.

Chapter 5: Exhaust Him!

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 5 – Exhaust Him!

Ji Ning remained quite calm, because this entire time he had the feeling that this sealed continuum had not finished revealing all of the dangers hidden within it. Although none of these dangers were truly lethal, if he didn't handle them correctly he would pay a heavy price for it.

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Inside the brightest of the three Elder Halls in this hidden dimension. Exalt Bowenya was looking nervously at the images in the air before him. The images were displaying the chaotic battle going on within the sealed spacetime continuum. Explosions were occurring everywhere as energy blasted about willy-nilly. Even though he was in control of the Sacred Realm, he wasn't able to clearly see what was going on in the battle. Clearly, a chaotic and terrifying war was going on, with all three Exalt-class Daoguard Towers focusing their long-distance firepower against Daolord Darknorth, with all the Hegemons working to assist the towers!

"What's the situation?" Exalt Bowenya barked coldly. He was able to get a vague sense of what was going on from watching the images, and it seemed as though his side held the advantage. They had surrounded Daolord Darknorth and were blasting him with attacks.

"Exalt." More than twenty avatars belonging to the battling Hegemons and Emperors were gathered next to him. True Sithe did not have avatars, as they were constantly being rejected and suppressed by this Chaosverse. It was impossible for them to use their godsense to keep and maintain an avatar.

In contrast, the Sithe descendants were native to this Chaosverse. They all had avatars. Clearly, then, the avatars located next to Exalt Bowenya all belonged to the Sithe progeny. These avatars belonged to the various squads who had been assigned to take part in this battle. Through them, the Exalt was able to quickly issue new orders as well as be updated on how the battle was progressing.

“Exalt, don’t worry. We have an absolute advantage in this battle. We’re definitely going to win,” a horned man said excitedly. “The astral chains have completely countered Daolord Darknorth’s advantages. Each time, he is forced to use his sword-arts to defend against us. He’s constantly using up energy, and his truesoul is crumbling at an increasing pace while we are sending more and more people into the sealed continuum to assault him. He’ll only be able to capture or kill one of two of us within a short period of time.

This sealed continuum was a hundred billion kilometers in size. Ning moved much more slowly due to all of the attacks raining down on him, and he was using up a lot of energy. As a result, he had to slowly move from Emperor to Emperor as he captured them.

“With our grand formation having been established, he won’t have any chance at all of capturing anyone from our team of thirty-five Hegemons and Emperors,” a black-robed elder said confidently.

“He’s already used his sword-arts at least ten times by now, and this is just the beginning! We have many tools remaining that we haven’t even used yet.”

“Exalt, let us use all the tools we have at our disposal.”

“Exalt, let us take part in the battle as well!”

“Alright.” Exalt Bowenya revealed a look of delight. “Hah! I knew it. He’s not going to pull anything unexpected out of his sleeves.”

The Exalt was no fool. Each plan he had used against Ning had a very high chance of success. In Purgatory, the Apocalypse-class castle would’ve stood a good chance of exhausting Ning to death, if it hadn’t been for Ning’s Storm Sword Dao allowing Ning to move much faster than anyone had anticipated.

As for the spacetime formation, the only reason why Ning had survived it was because the Apocalypse-class castle had bought him an extra hour of time to gain insight into a few of the formation’s mysteries. As a result, he had launched eighteen strikes and broke through that formation.

After these past two failures, the Sithe Exalt was actually beginning to lose confidence in himself. This time, however, everything was progressing smoothly in accordance with their plan. This caused him to feel quite delighted.

“This attack is much more powerful than the two previous attacks in Purgatory combined.” An expectant look was in Exalt Bowenya’s eyes. “We have three Daoguard Towers working together to rain attacks on him, after all, and we also have a large group of Hegemons and Emperors going all-out against him. Even if we can’t kill him head-on, we can exhaust him to death.”

“Send in the Bloodfiend Maze Formation as well,” Exalt Bowenya ordered.

“Understood!” Two of the Sithe descendants next to him immediately acknowledged the order respectively, then sent their squad of fifty-two Hegemons into battle as well.

“Have all eighteen of the Death Attendants enter as well!” Exalt Bowenya commanded.

Just a short while later... “Exalt, Daolord Darknorth is completely helpless against the Death Attendants. All he can do is rely on his speed to dodge. The more he dodges, the more awkward his movements become. We’re landing more and more attacks from the astral chain formations and the other formations, and he’s forced to use more and more sword-arts to defend.”

“His truesoul is beginning to crumble faster and faster.”

“Exalt, we’re definitely going to win!” All of the avatars of the Sithe taking part in the battle were extremely confident.

“Hahaha, I knew...!” Exalt Bowenya let out a laugh as he prepared to issue his final orders, but then he suddenly hesitated. He asked, “How many of our Hegemons and Emperors have been captured or killed?”

“Around sixty-five of them were taken or slain,” a black-robed elder said. Their formation was in control of the entire battlefield, allowing them to

know the casualties they had suffered.

“Quite heavy.” Exalt Bowenya couldn’t help but smile, even as he said these words. Even if all the Hegemons died, it would be worth it if they killed Daolord Darknorth. Right now, just twenty percent or so had perished!

“Yes, our casualties are indeed quite heavy, but Daolord Darknorth is extremely important to the entire Sithe race. If we can kill him, it will all be worth it.” The Hegemons and Emperors were brimming with the desire to do battle. They had known long ago that this would be a calamitous battle, but at least the situation was better than they had expected, even though more and more Hegemons and Emperors were being slain.

“If that’s the case, then send in the final two formation squads as well. All remaining Hegemons and Emperors, use your respective treasures to assist. Don’t let Daolord Darknorth focus his attention on any one area in particular,” Exalt Bowenya said.

“Yes.” Instantly, a large number of Hegemons and Emperors charged forth. This final wave included an enormous number of Emperors; there had to be over two thousand of them!

In truth, there was a limit to how many Hegemons could be used by the three Daoguard Towers. At most, eight hundred Hegemons was enough! More than two thousand of the other Hegemons were simply there to obscure Ning’s vision and to distract him. After all, Ning would continuously counter-attack and either kill or capture these Hegemons! If he managed to kill someone who was in control of a Daoguard Tower treasure, the impact would be significant, but if he only managed to kill one of the screeners, it would have no impact on the Sithe combat power.

Of course, even though these Emperors were merely a screening force, they were also provided with formations and Sithe treasures to slow Ning down.

“It seems I’ll be able to deal with Daolord Darknorth just by sacrificing a few Hegemons and Emperors.” Exalt Bowenya smiled broadly.

Time continued to tick past, second after second.

“We’ve already lost more than ninety Hegemons and Emperors.”

“Daolord Darknorth has used his sword-arts over forty times by now.”

“He managed to capture another thirty Hegemons and Emperors, but most of them were useless pawns. It won’t affect our combat power much. By now, he’s used his sword-arts over fifty times!”

The battle grew increasingly ferocious.

“He’s already captured over two hundred Hegemons and should have used his sword-arts at least eighty times by now. His truesoul is crumbling quite rapidly.” The avatars continued to make detailed combat reports to the Exalt.

“Over twenty Hegemons belonging to the Iceland Astral Chains have been captured. The formation has been destroyed!” Suddenly, this new report came out. The astral chain formations could still be maintained after suffering light casualties, but at a certain point it would still break apart.

“Keep fighting! Daolord Darknorth won’t be able to last much longer,” Exalt Bowenya said calmly. “He’s used his sword-arts many times... even if he didn’t go full-force for most of them, it should still have exhausted him tremendously.”

As time continued to flow on, three more of the major formations were breached as well. By now, Ning had either killed or captured over five hundred Hegemons and Emperors, and had used his sword-arts over 180 times.

“Almost. Almost!” Exalt Bowenya was waiting eagerly. “We’re going to win.” Each strike would consume a significant amount of Daolord Darknorth’s vitality, even if the strikes were not full-force. Based on his calculations, the Daolord would die after a total of around two hundred strikes.”

“We’ve lost over six hundred Hegemons and Emperors, while he’s already used his sword-arts more than two hundred times. We still have over two thousand people left, but we only have three formations

remaining. Daolord Darknorth is quite clever; he's been focusing his efforts on the Hegemons who are in control of the formations."

"Hold nothing back!" Exalt Bowenya ordered coldly. "He'll be dying any moment now, while we have over two thousand Hegemons and Emperors left. We'll be able to exhaust him to death!"

But... for some reason, the closer they came to success, the more uneasy Exalt Bowenya suddenly began to feel. He shook his head, forcing down that uneasy feeling and reassuring himself that it had appeared because he wanted to win too badly.

"Over seven hundred Hegemons and Emperors have been captured, while we only have two main formations remaining; the other formations aren't important and are just meant to screen the real ones. Daolord Darknorth hasn't died yet!"

"Over eight hundred have been captured. He's used his sword-arts over 250 times, but he still hasn't died! We only have one main formation left."

"Why hasn't he died yet?!" Exalt Bowenya was growing increasingly nervous and impatient.

"Not good!"

"Exalt!" Suddenly, half of the remaining avatars turned completely ashen. One of them said frantically, "Exalt, we've been counter-trapped!"

"Counter-trapped?!" The Exalt was completely dumbfounded.

Chapter 6: Putting On a Show

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 6 – Putting On a Show

Exalt Bowenya's face tightened. He murmured softly to himself, "Is he actually exhausted, or was he just pretending?"

He was beginning to feel some suspicions. The battle had progressed far too smoothly, causing him to feel a hint of unease deep inside. Each time, however, he had reassured himself that he was simply overthinking things! Upon hearing the remaining Hegemons cry that they had been counter-trapped? Exalt Bowenya's intuition, tempered by countless years of adventuring and battle, screamed that something was seriously wrong with this battle.

"Are all of you trapped?" Exalt Bowenya asked.

"We're all trapped. This entire place is filled with black fog. I can't see the other Hegemons and Emperors."

"We've been trapped as well."

"We're trapped." The various avatars of the Hegemons and Emperors all spoke out frantically, causing Exalt Bowenya to feel increasingly uneasy about this.

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Within the sealed spacetime continuum of a hundred billion kilometers.

Ning stood there in midair, relaxed and at his ease. Hundreds of millions of kilometers away, some magic treasures and formations continued to rain down attacks upon a second white-robed Daolord Darknorth. This second Daolord Darknorth was doing his best to dodge and evade while using his Water Sword Dao, Storm Sword Dao, and other techniques, with his truesoul at the brink of collapse.

"What is real is false. What is false is real." Ning murmured softly, "None of these Hegemons are able to see through my Illusion Sword Dao. I'm able to toy with them with ease." Ever since he had been trapped within this sealed continuum, his 'frenzied fighting' and his 'crumbling

truesoul' had all been falsified by his Illusion Sword Dao!

Ning's Sword Dao Domain was able to spread out to a distance of one billion kilometers! With but a thought, he caused this entire region to be transformed into an illusory realm. At Ning's current level of insight, the illusory beings within his domain had gained a basic level of sentience, emotions, and intelligence! This was an absolutely terrifying concept. In comparison, simply faking a battle scene within this domain was incredibly simple. The Hegemons and Emperors only saw what Ning wished for them to see!

If Ning was able to use his Omega Sword Dao to become an Autarch, his illusory domain would reach the level of being able to manifest reality itself. By then, his 'illusions' would be real on both the surface and inside. He could create an 'illusion' of a Universe treasure, and it would become a genuine Universe treasure. If he created the illusion of an expert, they would become real experts! But of course, this would require him to constantly consume a large amount of power.

Even now, the beings created by his illusions possessed intelligence, emotions, and sentience. Ning's 'Illusion Sword Dao' had become one of his killer techniques. In a battle against an Autarch, it would be somewhat effective but wouldn't necessarily be the determining factor... but against mere Hegemons and Emperors? The Illusion Sword Dao could toy with them with ease! However, it took Ning time to capture those Hegemons and break their formations, which is why he had continued to put on a show and buy more time.

"Master. We've already taken control of this formation," Azurefiend's avatar reported.

"Good." Ning revealed a delighted look, then waved his hand. A formation-base which was ten million kilometers long suddenly appeared next to him. Azurefiend's avatar, the Paragon of Pills, Lord Annihilation, Hegemon Tia, and Hegemon Flameleft were jointly controlling this grand formation, which was one of the many formations which Ning had taken away. He had let his team choose from the available formations and find one which they could use.

“Assemble the formation and use it to cover everything within a hundred billion kilometers,” Ning immediately ordered. “Trap them all. Let none escape!”

“Alright.”

“Leave it to us.” Azurefiend, Lord Annihilation, and the others were all quite excited. Capture two thousand Hegemons in one blow? They had never done or even seen anything like this before! All of them felt both eagerness and nervousness.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. A large amount of black fog spread out from within the formation. It almost instantly covered the entire sealed continuum, spreading out to a distance of a hundred billion kilometers. This formation had been meant to deal with Ning. It only had a minor effect on him, but it was perfect for dealing with these Hegemons and Emperors.

“I can’t see anything!”

“What a terrifying aura of darkness. I’ve been suppressed!”

“I can’t see anything either.”

“I can’t resist it.”

“We’ve been completely trapped.”

“We’ve been trapped as well!” The two thousand remaining Hegemons and Emperors were all beginning to panic, because Ning had already dealt with the most powerful formations earlier. The remaining Hegemons had just a single powerful formation left, but it was an attack-type formation that couldn’t affect this grand darkness formation at all!

Once the darkness spread out, almost 99% of the Hegemons and Emperors were completely paralyzed. The rest were able to fight back a bit thanks to the treasures they possessed, but there were only around ten or so in total. They wouldn’t be able to make much of a difference.

“Time to bring it to an end.” Ning immediately began to fly towards those remaining Hegemons. His Sword Dao Domain quickly spread out to

cover them, completely suppressing them and making it impossible for them to move. With but a thought, Ning drew all the Hegemons into his estate-world and imprisoned them in separate parts of it!

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Soon, all of the Hegemons and Emperors within the sealed continuum had been drawn away.

“Impressive, Darknorth. I never would’ve dared to imagine a result like this.” The Paragon of Pills was incomparably excited, while the nearby Azurefiend, Lord Annihilation, Tia, and Flameleft were stunned as well.

“Now that I’ve taken part in such a great undertaking, I can die with no regrets. I imagine my old friends wouldn’t even believe me when I tell them about this,” Hegemon Flameleft sighed with shock.

“More than two thousand Hegemons and Emperors!” Azurefiend sighed as well.

Ning nodded. “More than two thousand eight hundred, to be precise. However, it was all thanks to you helping out. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to activate that formation on my own.”

“All we did was use that formation in a very simple manner, nothing else.” Lord Annihilation said hurriedly, “In the end, it was all thanks to your unearthly power, Daolord Darknorth. You dealt with the biggest problems, allowing us to sweep up the scattered remnants.”

“Stop flattering me,” Ning said with a laugh. “Go ahead and enter my estate-world. This was merely our first battle in the Sacred Realm. It is far too early to be celebrating.”

“With you by our side, Daolord, we’ll definitely make it out alive.” Lord Annihilation continued his flattery.

“Be careful, Darknorth.” The Paragon of Pills looked at him.

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The sealed spacetime continuum was now completely empty. The only person left within this region of a hundred billion kilometers was Ji Ning!

“Now that was a fine show we put on.” Ning couldn’t help but grin when

he thought about what had happened just now. In order to make the performance seem as realistic as possible, he even used up a few of his Sithe treasures, allowing them to take blows meant for him and then explode in dramatic fashion. He actually made use of them as well, as the fragments would clearly be real even after flying out of the range of his Sword Dao Domain.

Illusions... reality... Ning was now an absolute grandmaster in blending the two together, and so all of the Hegemons and Emperors fell into his grasp.

“I’ll scan their memories first.” He had captured most of them alive, sparing even the many true Sithe he had captured, all for the sake of finding those nine special techniques. This was something which would have an impact on his own chances of survival!

He waved his hand, causing a true Sithe Hegemon to appear before him.

“Daolord Darknorth?” The Sithe Hegemon stared at Ning, shocked. He then gritted his teeth and said, “W-what do you want?”

Ning continued to maintain his Illusion Sword Dao Domain. To the Sithe, it looked as though Ning’s truesoul was crumbling away rapidly. It looked as though Ning was at the very verge of death.

“Do you want to live, or do you want to die?” Ning asked.

“Live? Die?” The Sithe Hegemon was stunned. Who would choose death if life was an option? But as he hesitated, Ning secretly lured his mind into the illusory realm, causing a dazed look to appear in his eyes. Ning then began to flip through the memories of this Sithe Hegemon.

“He also swore a lifeblood oath not to reveal anything?” Ning’s face tightened. “The Sithe truly are cautious. Even the true Sithe were forced to swear lifeblood oaths.”

He wasn’t able to find the nine techniques, and so he turned his attention to the Hegemon’s other memories, carefully viewing them in the hopes of finding something useful.

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Within the brightest Elder Hall. Exalt Bowenya stood silently on his feet, with the avatars of his servants by his side. All of their true bodies had been captured alive! Clearly, they had already lost the first battle. All the Hegemons and Emperors had been captured, with a tiny fraction having been killed.

“Exalt.” Two figures appeared next to him. It was the incarnations of Hawkfang and Jonnbech.

It was fairly easy for such high-level cultivators to use divine power to manifest incarnations. So long as the incarnations remained fairly close to their true bodies, the incarnations could be maintained with ease! Hawkfang and Jonnbech’s true bodies were both located in the other two Elder Halls, which were quite close. As a result, it was easy for them to maintain incarnations here.

However, incarnations formed via divine power were all extremely weak, negligibly weak when compared to their true bodies! In contrast, avatars were different. Avatars could come close to true bodies in power, with some able to reach 70% or even 80%.

“What should we do next?” Jonnbech’s incarnation asked.

Chapter 7: Pity

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 7 – Pity

Exalt Bowenya instructed, “Go ahead and cancel the formations.”

“Understood,” Hawkfang said. The formation which sealed the spacetime continuum around Ji Ning was under the control of his Flameland Elder Hall. The sealed continuum quickly dissipated, allowing the region at the base of the distant Sacred Mountains to go back to normal and reveal Daolord Darknorth at its center.

“Ahahaha! Sithe Exalt, do you have any other tricks up your sleeve?” Ning called out loudly from the base of the Sacred Mountains.

From afar, it looked as though his truesoul was crumbling quite quickly.

“His truesoul has crumbled to the point where he is on the verge of death. I’m amazed at how calm he is.” Jonnbech stared downwards from his Elder Hall to the base of the Sacred Mountains, then let out a sigh: “Truly impressive.”

“If I was in his position, I’d probably have gone completely berserk by now,” Hawkfang’s incarnation agreed.

Exalt Bowenya stared from afar, his forehead creased in a frown. “Do you think Daolord Darknorth’s truesoul is truly crumbling that fast? Or is it perhaps a deception?”

“A deception?” The avatars of the Hegemons, Hawkfang, and Jonnbech all stared at him in surprise. They had all reached incredibly high levels of insight. To deceive them would be nearly impossible! They had never encountered something like this after becoming Hegemons and Emperors.

“You haven’t experienced enough. The things you see, the things you sense... it can all be a lie. Even your own intuition can be deceived.” Exalt Bowenya looked at the distant Ning. “We’ve lost the first battle, just like that. I can’t help but feel that something is wrong. If Daolord Darknorth was extremely skilled in the Dao of Illusions, he would be able to put on a show which none of you could see through.”

“A show?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech spoke out at the same time. Both were shocked.

“That’s just one possibility. It’s also possible that he really is at the verge of death.” Exalt Bowenya narrowed his eyes. Unlike these Hegemons and Emperors, when he lived in his own Chaosverse he was an actual Autarch, and his opponents were also Autarchs! In fact, he had even met someone who was even more powerful than the Autarchs. He was much more experienced and knew just how terrifying the Dao of Illusions could be.

Exalt Bowenya said calmly, “I’m just saying that this is a possibility. You have to be wary of it during our upcoming battles.”

“What should we do next?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech looked at Exalt Bowenya.

“What can we do? Use our Daoguard Towers to fight back against him as best we can,” Exalt Bowenya said.

Their Daoguard Towers had already used up virtually all of their many long-distance offensive treasures in the first battle. Exalt Bowenya’s goal had been to focus-fire everything on Ning and destroy him in their first engagement. However, they had already lost that critical battle. As a result, they now had far fewer resources available to them. The only things left were the Daoguard Towers themselves!

Boom! Ning suddenly soared into the skies, then landed down upon the peak of a distant mountain. He then sat down in the lotus position, establishing a Sword Dao Domain that completely separated him from the world beyond. A region of one billion kilometers transformed into a blurry field of light, preventing Exalt Bowenya and the others from seeing anything else.

“He’s started to train again?”

“He’s about to die. He’s still training?”

Everyone, even Exalt Bowenya, felt their hearts clench. When Ning had first entered Purgatory, he had done the same thing. He sat down in the lotus position and meditated until he mastered his Wind Sword Dao. After

defeating the first castle, he had then entered another lengthy training session which had concluded with his mastery of the Storm Sword Dao! And after breaking through the spacetime formation, he had trained for over a hundred chaos cycles before mastering the Illusion Sword Dao.

Each time Ning concluded a battle, he would begin a training session... and each time, the training session would be quite long. Now that Ning had finished his first big battle in the Sacred Realm, he actually started to train once again. Exalt Bowenya and the others had no idea as to how they should respond!

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Ning sat there in the lotus position at a peak below the Sacred Mountains, his Sword Dao Domain severing this peak from the world around him.

“Time to continue.” Ning summoned another Sithe Hegemon and began to flip through his memories. Time continued to flow on. Each Hegemon consumed quite a bit of time, ranging from four hours to as long as five days!

Whoosh. Ning willed a Sithe descendant to appear before him. This one was fairly handsome but quite skinny. When he saw Ning, a shocked look appeared on his face. “Daolord Darknorth!” Next, a maddened and hateful look appeared in his eyes.

“Not good.” Ning sensed a bit of danger. He hurriedly retreated while taking out a large astral treasure and placing it before him.

BOOM! The skinny Emperor suddenly exploded, causing a terrifying surge of power to blast outwards. This explosion was on par with the might of the Blazesun Ruler, and it smashed directly onto the astral treasure in front of Ning. The treasure was smashed backwards and sent flying more than ten million kilometers before Ning managed to regain control over it and bring it back.

“He actually detonated a treasure he was carrying on him to launch one final attack. He knew that his chances of killing me were slim, but he was still willing to sacrifice his life?” Ning shook his head, murmuring softly to

himself. He had clearly seen the maddened, hateful look in that Sithe man's eyes; the man had truly viewed him as a hated foe! Ning, however, didn't feel any enmity towards them. Strictly speaking, the 'Sithe descendants' were actually natives to this Chaosverse who had been born and bred here, just like Ning himself.

Another half-month went by. Ning continued to summon Sithe descendants and flip through their memories. On this day, he summoned a female Emperor. She was similarly startled when she saw Ning appear before her, then moved to self-detonate without hesitate.

"Freeze." This time, Ning moved much more decisively. Previously, he would chat a bit with his prisoners to shake their willpower. This time, he instantly sent a tendril of the sword-intent from his Illusion Sword Dao into her body.

The maddened look quickly disappeared from the crazed female Emperor eyes and was replaced by a lost look. Ning shook his head, his mood poor. He began to scan the female Emperor's memories.

This woman was known as Empress Gracevoid. Her path of cultivation had been one filled with setbacks. She had originally been a mortal physician, but a stroke of karmic luck had set her upon the path of cultivation. Her heart was filled with kindness and benevolence, and she chose the Daoist title 'Gracevoid' because her clan's apothecary shop had been named the 'Gracevoid Hall'. The title 'Fairy Gracevoid' or 'Daoist Gracevoid' had accompanied her as she had progressed up the path of cultivation.

She bore love for all life, including even the grass and the plants. Her heart was filled with love for everyone, but most of all she loved the homeland where she had been born and bred.

However... this battle against Ning was a battle which could not be avoided. One side had to die! The Sithe viewed the cultivators as their mortal enemies, and Exalt Bowenya himself had stated that if they lost, this dimension would still end up being annihilated by that cultivator Daolord! Her homeland would be completely destroyed. Empress

Gracevoid couldn't accept this, and so she swore she would kill this demon known as 'Daolord Darknorth'! She would be willing to pay any price needed to accomplish this.

"The greater the love, the deeper the hate." Ning let out a sigh. "Hand over all of your treasures," Ning said, and the illusion-trapped Empress obediently handed over all of her treasures.

Ning didn't really care about the treasures themselves, of course. His worry was that this Empress would once more attempt to commit suicide! "Now wake up," Ning said softly.

The Empress trembled slightly, regaining her clarity of mind. When she saw Ning, she once more prepared to launch a desperate assault... but then, she realized she had no treasures on her at all. If she simply tried to self-detonate herself, the resulting blast wouldn't be enough to threaten even a mere Hegemon, to say nothing of this terrifying Daolord.

"Why must you act like this upon seeing me?" Ning shook his head. "Another Emperor tried to do the same earlier. I was a bit slower and wasn't able to save him."

"There's no need to shed crocodile tears," the Empress said angrily. "You cultivators are our mortal enemies. Once we lose the war, our home will be finished!"

"I, Daolord Darknorth, swear on my very life itself that even if I do gain victory in the Sacred Realm, I'll leave without harming any of the six mortal realms here," Ning swore.

The Empress was stunned. There was no way to falsify a lifeblood oath.

"I never wanted to destroy your world," Ning said. "And you aren't even true Sithe. Technically speaking, you belong to the same 'race' as me. The Sithe are the outsiders, not us."

"Huh?!" The Empress couldn't believe it.

"N-no... I'm a Sithe descendant. There's no question about that!" the Empress argued.

“Even so, you are fundamentally different from them on an intrinsic level. Haven’t you noticed yet? They treat you as nothing more than a pawn.” Ning felt pity for these Sithe progeny. He held both Empress Gracevoid and the man who had self-detonated in high regard, even though they all wanted him dead.

Chapter 8: Battle to the Death

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 8 – Battle to the Death

“Different?” The Empress fell silent. As an Eternal Empress, she was no fool; she had realized long ago that there were some differences between the Sithe descendants and the true Sithe! Over the course of many years, the Hegemons and Emperors within this hidden dimension had slowly diverged into two main camps. The first was led by the true Sithe, while the second was led by the Sithe descendants. There were indeed some true Sithe who held their descendants in contempt. Exalt Bowenya ensured that they didn’t go too far and that conflict didn’t erupt, but everyone could sense the tension.

Still other Sithe managed to hide their contempt, but the more powerful descendants could still sense it. This infuriated them all the more, which was why they ended up following Hawkgfang and setting up their own camp.

“We train in divine power and Immortal energy, but they train in a completely different type of energy,” the Empress said softly. “We might both be ‘Hegemons’, but our side completely surpasses them in power. When we strike, the mighty power of the Dao flows through us... but they are dramatically weakened and don’t have the power of the Dao behind them.”

“We descendants know all these things, and we have many suspicions, but... but without a doubt, they are our ancestors.” An anxious look appeared in the Empress’ eyes. “Hawkgfang, for example. His father was one of the Exalts. We might have some quarrels with them, but we are definitely their children and grandchildren. There’s no question about this at all... and so without a doubt, we are Sithe.”

“Wrong.” Ning shook his head. “The power of the Dao comes from the power of the primordial chaos, which is omnipresent. They have been rejected by it, which is why they are unable to summon the power of the Dao... and only the true Sithe will be rejected!”

“You, however, are part of our Chaosverse. You are completely different types of lifeforms from them. In this battle... ugh. I have to admit, you Sithe progeny are placed in a rather awkward situation.” Ning shook his head. “You’ll only be truly free once this war comes to an end.”

The female Empress had the vague feeling that Daolord Darknorth was not lying to her. “I understand.” This was her only response. She said nothing further.

“Go then.” Ning waved his hand, sending her back into his estate-world.

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Ning continued to rifle through the memories of the Hegemons and Emperors. None of the true Sithe attempted to self-detonate, because they all knew the truth! This was an invasion, while they were the invaders and had lost. They did, however, feel some degree of resentment towards Ning. They were unhappy that Ning had come here and disturbed their tranquil lives, embroiling them into a deadly war once more.

As for the Sithe progeny? Nearly 10% of them attempted to self-detonate or launch some other type of attack! They were willing to sacrifice anything for their homes. As a result, Ning immediately captured them with his illusions when he summoned them, then rifled through their memories to know what they were intending. That way, they didn’t have a chance to attack Ning.

“Poor bastards. They’ll be in a rather awkward position until the day that this war ends.” Even if they wanted to join the cultivators... could the cultivators trust them? Of course not! The mighty cultivator civilizations didn’t need a few extra Hegemons or Emperors. They would probably first put them in internment camps somewhere else, not letting them take part in the war to come!

“Once our Chaosverse gains a controller, there will be no more invaders. Only then would our Chaosverse be strong and confident enough to welcome the Sithe descendants without needing to worry about them.” Although Ning felt mixed emotions about them, his decisions would not be impacted by those emotions. He knew that this was just one of many

sad stories that came as a result of this clash of civilizations.

If they lost this war, all cultivator civilizations in this Chaosverse would be brought to an end. That would be a true apocalypse! Thus, Ning wouldn't show any mercy at all to the true Sithe. He killed almost all of them after flipping through their memories, sparing only those few who Ning felt were quite benevolent in nature and had been forced to take part in this war against their will.

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Ten years later. On this day, Ning finally finished reviewing the memories of the 2800+ Hegemons and Emperors he had captured.

"Nothing!" Ning frowned. He had expected this result, but he still felt quite disappointed. Everyone who had ever learned the nine special techniques had been forced to swear lifeblood oaths not to transmit them to any others. There was no way to review the techniques at all.

"Exalt Bowenya, perhaps?" Ning rose to his feet, staring at the three glowing Daoguard Towers off in the distance. "Judging from the memories I reviewed, he should be the one in control of this entire hidden dimension! He seems to have some sort of connection to the Sithe heartlands, as the orders to the Sithe are sent via him."

"But the heart of the Sithelands have been sealed off long ago. How is it that they are still connected to the outside world?" Ning frowned.

During the Dawn War, the Autarchs had commanded countless cultivators to assault and defeat the Sithe. They had occupied the outer perimeter of the Sithelands, then completely sealed away the heartland regions! But this hidden dimension... not only had the Autarchs been unable to discover it, it was even in contact with the Sithe heartlands.

"I wonder if the experts within the Sithe heartlands have a way to escape or not." Ning was beginning to feel a bit of worry. Being in contact was one thing, but if the Sithe army was somehow able to slip out without anyone noticing... that would be a serious problem!

"Time to go to war." Ning rose to his feet, then turned and stared at the

three distant Daoguard Towers. He took a single step forwards, quickly soaring into the skies towards the Daoguard Towers. His Sword Dao Domain continuously expanded, while he maintained the illusion of his truesoul crumbling at incredible speeds. He looked just like a Daolord who was on the verge of death.

“He’s coming.” Exalt Bowenya and the incarnations of Hawkfang and Jonnbech were gathered together. The other Hegemons and Emperors had retreated; it was now up to the three of them to carry out this battle.

“Bowenya!” Ning’s voice echoed throughout the heavens as he flew towards the Daoguard Tower located at the very rear.

“He’s actually headed straight for my Daoguard tower?” Exalt Bowenya frowned.

“Exalt, what should we do?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech were both rather anxious. Previously, they had been hoping that Ning would attack their Elder Halls first. The Elder Halls were all Exalt-class Daoguard Towers, and each was filled with countless dangers. They had clung onto the hope that Ning would actually charge inside their Daoguard Towers... but Ning had completely ignored them!

This was because Ning could vaguely sense that the central control mechanisms for this entire hidden dimension were located within the rear Elder Hall.

“If he’s heading straight for me,” Exalt Bowenya said coldly, “Then just go ahead and give him a proper greeting. Hawkfang, you go first. If you fail, Jonnbech will follow you.”

“Understood,” Hawkfang said respectfully.

“Don’t worry. Although I suspect Daolord Darknorth might be feigning weakness, as a Daolord he probably hasn’t been training long enough to reach such a ridiculously high level in the Dao of Illusions! If his injuries are real, then he should be at the verge of death. It’ll be easy for you to kill him,” Exalt Bowenya said.

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By now, Ning was already very close to the Daoguard Tower in the back. Suddenly, a rumbling sound could be heard. The three towering Daoguard Towers were located on the peaks of three separate mountains. The sound of explosions suddenly emanated from one of them, causing the earth to shake as it began to separate from the mountains beneath it.

“What?!” Ning turned to glance at the distant Daoguard Tower, watching in shock as it slowly separated from the mountain beneath it. “Daoguard Towers are incredibly hard to establish. They were actually willing to discard the foundation for that tower?”

Daoguard Towers were extremely stable after being constructed. Daoguard Towers were extremely powerful, partially because of the treasures they held, but also because of the extremely complicated formations governing their foundations. These formations allowed them to draw large amounts of energy through the earth, ensuring that the Daoguard Tower could function indefinitely!

The complex formations also allowed them to maintain control over an extremely wide region, making that region part of their territory. The technique they had used to trap Ning within that sealed spacetime continuum during the previous battle was just one example of that control. Now, however, the three Daoguard Towers had already exhausted all of their long-range attacks. Their only option was to use the towers themselves to fight.

When the situation was truly dire, or when a tower's owner was determined to battle to the death, some truly berserk actions could be taken. For example, when Ning had rescued the Paragon of Pills, the controller of that tower had actually allowed the tower itself to crumble in order to release the terrifying being trapped beneath it.

Every single Daoguard Tower was the home base for a powerful Sithe expert. If they were truly driven to the brink, they could separate the Daoguard Tower from the foundation, choosing to either flee or battle with the foe to the end.

Chapter 9: Dueling Hawkfang

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 9 – Dueling Hawkfang

“Once the Daoguard Tower breaks free from its foundation, many of its formations will become unusable, and it’ll no longer be able to draw any more energy into itself. It’ll only be able to use whatever energy it already accumulated prior to breaking free,” Ji Ning mused to himself. “Without the foundation supporting its many formations, the Daoguard Tower will be dramatically weakened and won’t last long in battle.”

“And... I don’t even need to go inside that Daoguard Tower.” Ning was brimming with confidence. “I’ll definitely win this battle!”

The frenzied war outside the Sacred Realm had been dangerous to him because there had been 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors attacking him, reinforced by multiple formations and treasures from the Daoguard Towers! If Ning had chosen to fight them squarely, he probably would’ve died in that battle. Thankfully, he was able to rely on his Illusion Sword Dao to put on a fine show without actually using up much energy. Now, things would be much simpler.

The only thing worrying him was the Daoguard Tower controlled by Exalt Bowenya! The other Daoguard Towers would be comparatively easier to deal with.

“I need to conserve as much energy as I can.” Ning watched as the distant Daoguard Tower flew through the skies in his direction. “Based on the memories I searched, this Daoguard Tower should be the ‘Flameland Elder Hall’ which Hawkfang controls. I hear that he’s an incredibly talented genius who has a chance of becoming an Autarch!”

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After breaking free from its foundation, the Flameland Elder Hall began to fly by itself through the air. This was going to be a battle to the death, a war without quarter. Roughly four hundred Hegemons and Emperors were within the Flameland Elder Hall. The entire Sacred Realm only had a total of around 1,200 Hegemons and Emperors left, and they were divided into

three squads controlled by Hawkfang, Jonnbech, and Exalt Bowenya.

The Hegemons and Emperors who followed Hawkfang were all Sithe descendants!

“Hawkfang, Daolord Darknorth is already at the verge of death. There’s no need for you to fight personally. Let us go instead! We’ll exhaust him to death,” a muscular, fiery-armored man said.

“Right! Hawkfang, you have to stay alive. So long as you are alive, the future generations of Hegemons and Emperors here will have someone to protect them and make their lives easier. Let us be the vanguard in this battle. Once we kill that demon, this tribulation will be at an end and we’ll all be able to relax.”

Hawkfang was silent. His heart was filled with many mixed emotions. He didn’t feel much hatred towards Daolord Darknorth, because he had seen too much and knew too much. He had long ago learned the truth when his avatar had accompanied his father in that final battle during the Dawn War.

Is there no way out at all? Hawkfang glanced at his comrades. All of them were native to this dimension. They were powerful experts who had arduously arisen from amongst the countless mortal cultivators born within this realm. He had known them for countless aeons, and they were all linked together by deep bonds of love and affection.

There’s no way out. We’ve all sworn oaths long ago to be loyal to Exalt Bowenya and obey his commands. If we flee, we’ll all die. For the sake of my friends and brothers... Daolord Darknorth, I suppose you’ll have to die in their stead. Cold light flashed through Hawkfang’s eyes.

“Hear my orders!” Hawkfang called out loudly. All of the Hegemons and Emperors turned solemn and let out acknowledging shouts.

“Assemble a total of three Ragnorak Formations! We’ll need a total of 192 Emperors to control them.” Hawkfang swept the area with his gaze, then waved his hand and sent his Immortal energy flying out towards 192 of the figures present. “You shall control these three formations. Hurry up and take control!”

“Understood!”

“Everyone else, focus on offensive formations. We’ll split the remaining Hegemons into six squads which will control these formations.” Hawkfang divided up the remaining Hegemons into multiple squads. He had more Hegemons and Emperors than he needed to fully staff the Daoguard Tower’s formations, and so he assigned them to control other formations instead.

“Hawkfang, what about our avatars?”

“Our avatars will be able to fight as well!” the Sithe descendants said hurriedly.

Hawkfang replied coldly, “Deploy your avatars as you see fit. Prepare all your treasures and get ready for our final battle.”

“Alright.”

“Let’s go!” The Hegemons and Emperors quickly began to take control over the respective formations.

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Ning’s Sword Dao Domain was continuously maintaining an illusory field within its reach. To the Sithe, it looked as though Ning was soaring through the skies towards them... but in reality, Ning was more than six hundred million kilometers away from his illusory location!

“The Daoguard Tower. If I refuse to go inside, what can it possibly do to me?” Ning stared as that twelve-storied tower flew towards him from afar. This Daoguard Tower radiated a weighty aura of might, and it did give Ning a vague sense of danger. It continued to move closer to Ning’s real location, causing him to frown. He immediately began to retreat, wanting to pull away from it as much as possible.

“Attack!” This cold shout came from the lips of a black-robed man whose eyes were terrifyingly calm. He stood at the entrance to the Daoguard Tower, staring at Ning.

Ning was able to see the opening, but he certainly wasn’t going to charge

into it and enter the Daoguard Tower!

“Hawktfang?” Ning immediately recognized this person. He had already ‘met’ Hawktfang numerous times while rifling through the memories of the captured Emperors.

Rumble...

A series of formation-lines suddenly lit up on the ninth floor of the Daoguard Tower, with a large amount of power circulating through it.

Whoosh...

A dimensional wave filled with destructive power swept out towards Ning, moving so fast and covering such a great area that it almost instantly appeared before him.

“Damn! They’ve actually completely boxed me in.” Ning frowned when he saw this. His illusions were still active, but his opponents had launched such a large-scale attack that everything within his Sword Dao Domain was being assaulted, including both the illusory Ning and the real Ning!

There was really nothing Ning could do against such a large-scale area attack. He immediately drew a Northbow sword and lightly sliced the air, causing a dimensional ripple to spread out and surround him. He was going to use his Space Sword Dao to counter these dimensional ripples.

Ning was securely ensconced in a dimensional ‘bubble’ which resisted the all-encompassing attack. Ning could sense exactly how much power was pushing against him, and he made sure that his bubble held just a tiny bit more power. He also continued to maintain the illusions with his Sword Dao Domain, having the illusory Ning also ‘block’ with the Space Sword Dao.

“Attack!” Yet another order rang out. This time, the sixth floor of the Daoguard Tower unleashed a terrifyingly large streak of saber-light that shot out in a fan-shape. This fan of saber-light was composed of countless tiny streaks of saber-light that were densely clustered together. Their power was overwhelming, and they also constitute a vast area attack that completely covered the entire Sword Dao Domain, viciously smashing

through everything within it!

There was nothing Ning could do except use his sword-arts to defend once again. Fortunately, it didn't require too much energy as these untargeted area attacks were much less dangerous to Ning, in that the force exerted against each individual within the area was much lower than in the case of a targeted attack. It was just barely at the Blazesun Ruler level of power, and so Ning was able to block without too much difficulty.

“Attack!” This time, the attack came from the third floor of the Daoguard Tower. It burst forth with the most powerful attack yet, unleashing a stream of golden flames which covered the skies and blazed away at everything within the Sword Dao Domain.

“Have they already guessed that I'm using illusions? Otherwise, why would they exclusively use such large-scale attacks?” Ning frowned. These large-scale attacks weren't that dangerous, but they still took up some of his energy. Ning couldn't help but feel worried. “Time to change strategies.”

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Exalt Bowenya and Jonnbech were carefully watching this battle from afar. It was impossible for Hawkefang to fully control the tower while using his godsense to maintain a connection with an incarnation, and so he had dispelled it for now. The only people remaining here were Bowenya and Jonnbech's incarnation.

“Watch carefully, Jonnbech.” Exalt Bowenya stared at the distant Ning intently. “I hope Hawkefang can win this battle, but if he loses, you are next! You are one of the most impressive Sithe Hegemons to have come here. I don't care too much if the others die, but I hope you will survive.”

“Don't worry, Exalt,” Jonnbech said. Jonnbech was the only Hegemon within this entire hidden dimension who had a truly perfect Dao-heart. He was close to becoming an Exalt himself.

True Sithe were only able to become Exalts in this dimension, but their children could become Autarchs! This was why the Sithe had paid so much attention to Hawkefang. In his heart, though, Exalt Bowenya still felt

closer to Jonnbech. He couldn't help it; the two were both true Sithes.

"It doesn't matter if Daolord Darknorth really is skilled in putting on a show. We'll find out the truth soon enough." Jonnbech stared from afar. "If he can endure even this sort of all-out assault from Hawkfang's Flameland Elder Hall, we can be all but certain that his 'injuries' were a false front."

"Yes. If he truly is at the brink of death, it's highly unlikely that he will be able to defeat Hawkfang's Flameland Elder Hall," Exalt Bowenya agreed.

"Hawkfang's quite intelligent as well." Jonnbech continued to watch, then let out a cold smile: "He's using up all the remaining power of his Daoguard Tower to launch repeated wide-scale attacks. That was the fifteenth wave of attacks!"

Exalt Bowenya just continued to watch silently. So what if Hawkfang died? So what if even Jonnbech died? He cared, but not that much. So long as he himself survived and managed to successfully kill Ning, he would be a happy man.

Chapter 10: Utterly Exhausted

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 10 – Utterly Exhausted

The white-robed Ji Ning was continuing to dodge and retreat in midair, while the Flameland Elder Hall was continuing to launch frenzied attacks against him.

Rumble...

The Flameland Elder Hall launched attack after attack, using those massive streams of golden fire, the enormous fans of saber-light, and those giant dimensional waves. On top of these wide-ranging area attacks, they also launched quite a number of single-target attacks against Ning! These single-target attacks were more focused, and as a result they were more powerful!

“We’ve already launched a total of fifteen wide-range attacks, and also launched nineteen waves of attacks with our other formations. How is he still able to keep fighting?” The Hegemons within the Flameland Elder Hall who were in control of the formations were beginning to grow anxious.

“His truesoul is collapsing even more quickly now. He’ll probably be dying soon.”

“He’s so powerful that he far surpasses any other Daolord. His truesoul is probably much stronger as well, allowing him to stay alive for a longer period of time.”

“Let’s give him another blast.”

“He’ll die any moment now.” Under Hawkefang’s direction, the Hegemons and Emperors in the Flameland Elder Hall launched yet another furious wave attacks, while Ning continued to retreat while blocking as best he could.

Time continued to tick away. Hawkefang watched as the rate at which Ning’s truesoul crumbled away continued to increase. He was clearly in increasingly bad shape. Any ordinary Daolord would’ve died long ago!

Ning, however, was able to somehow keep fighting.

More time passed. Ning continued to run around the area, blocking and defending. He looked as though he was in his death throes... but he simply wouldn't die! By now, the Fireland Elder Hall had used up the majority of its energy stores.

"It's all an illusion!" Hawkfang suddenly said coldly, a frozen look on his face.

"An illusion?" The avatars of the Emperors next to him were all stunned. As the battle had raged on for longer than they had expected, they too had started to grow increasingly uneasy, but they could tell that the white-robed Daolord's truesoul really was crumbling away faster and faster. It looked as though they were very close to succeeding in their task of slaying this 'Daolord Darknorth'. They really didn't want to believe it was all an illusion.

Hawkfang gritted his teeth. "He was already at death's door before we even started! By now, the Flameland Elder Hall has used up more than half of our energy stores, yet he is somehow still able to keep up the fight? He's just a Daolord! How strong could his truesoul possibly be?"

"Then w-we..." the Hegemons and Emperors all started to panic.

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"So it really is an illusion." Exalt Bowenya watched from afar. "He is the first Daolord to master an Eternal Omega Dao in this Chaosverse. He truly cannot be underestimated! Still... while I knew his sword-arts were powerful, I never would've imagined that his illusions would be so incredible as well. Even I cannot see any flaws in his illusions."

Exalt Bowenya remained quite calm. He had been alive for a very long time, and the Sithe Chaosverse was a far more advanced place than this one. Back in his homeland, there had been quite a few who had become Eternal Emperors via an Omega Dao! Thus, Exalt Bowenya was able to accurately judge Ning's power and abilities. However, he felt that since Ning was a Daolord who had failed the Daomerge, by all rights he should've been lacking in areas aside from his primary Dao, as he simply

hadn't been alive long enough. Now, it seemed, Daolord Darknorth had reached incredible heights in the art of illusions.

"Then what should I do, Exalt?" Jonnbech frowned.

"Follow our original plan," Exalt Bowenya said. "I'll give you every treasure I can spare! There's no way Hawkfang can win this fight. His Flameland Elder Hall will run out of energy soon, and once it does it won't even be able to continue flying! This battle will be up to you."

"Understood." Jonnbech nodded.

"What a pity." Exalt Bowenya stared off into the distance. "We have had innumerable progeny, but Hawkfang was quite arguably the most talented one to have ever arisen within this Chaosverse. He had a good chance of becoming an Autarch! If he succeeded, his status would've skyrocketed to a level that was much higher than my own. Unfortunately, his Dao-heart was flawed and he has never been able to perfect it."

To become an Autarch, one needed a perfect Dao-heart. The same was needed to master an Eternal Omega Dao.

"He'll probably die here." Exalt Bowenya let out a sigh. Once the power of the Flameland Elder Hall was used up, it would no longer pose a threat to Daolord Darknorth at all, who would be able to capture Hawkfang with ease. Not even Exalt Bowenya would dare to battle Ning head-on without the backing of his Daoguard Tower.

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Within the Sword Dao Domain. A glowing castle that was merely thirty meters long was stationed here, with Ning and Azurefiend's avatar located within it. Azurefiend's avatar was pouring Immortal energy into the castle, keeping it active. As for Ning, he was seated off to one side in front of a table that had a flask of wine and a wine cup on it. Every so often, he would lift up the wine cup and take a sip.

He only needed to spare a bit of attention to maintaining the illusions within the Sword Dao Doman, making the illusory Ning's performance more convincing! The single-target attacks were powerful and

concentrated, with the ones shooting out from this Exalt-class Daoguard Tower being close to Autarch-level attacks in might. However, they all hit the illusory Ning without harming the real one in the slightest.

As for the large-scale attacks, they dispersed their might across an extremely wide area, making it fairly easy to defend against them. However, Ning wasn't willing to do so and instead took out a Sithe treasure.

It must be remembered that Ning had captured over 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors during the previous battle! They had carried many types of treasures on them, and it could be said that they collectively held roughly over 80% of the total Sithe treasures within this hidden dimension. Now, those treasures were all Ning's! There were actually over ten items that were on the level of the Blacksun. Ning had pulled out one of them and allowed Azurefiend's avatar to bind it, then used it to defend against the attacks.

Ning had selected this castle for its sturdiness and defensive strength. It was able to defend against the large-scale attacks that struck it with ease. This castle was on the same level as the Blacksun, and it was specialized in defense. Attacks like this, merely on par with the Blazesun Ruler, were completely unable to breach its thick walls. The only thing they did was to consume Azurefiend's power.

"Withdraw." Ning watched the battle proceed while causing his Sword Dao Domain to rapidly retreat and disperse.

"Master, why are you having us retreat?" Azurefiend's avatar asked. "These Sithe have extremely powerful attacks, but the wide-scale ones are all being blocked by the castle. Why should we withdraw?"

"That's where you are wrong." Ning laughed. "Warfare isn't as simple as attacking and defending. You need to see beyond the clashes to the nature of the battle itself. There's no need for us to do too much in this battle against the Flameland Elder Hall. Given enough time, they will run out of energy and we will have won."

Ning's gaze went through the walls of the castle, allowing him to see the

Flameland Elder Hall which continued to pursue and assault them. “Once they broke free from their foundations, they no longer had any chance to retreat. Their only option was to unleash all the power available to them in a final, desperate assault,” Ning explained. “So... why should we actually fight them? I’ll just keep running, while they will keep chasing. It actually takes this Daoguard Tower energy to fly through the air as well.”

There was another unspoken reason why Ning had them continuously retreat. This was because he wanted to stay as far away from the other two Elder Halls as possible! That way, once he captured all the Hegemons and Emperors in the Flameland Elder Hall, he would be able to review their memories without being disturbed. If he was too close to the other two Elder Halls, they’d probably launch attacks at him and disrupt him. If he stayed farther away, it would be harder for them to bother him.

.....

Explosions of ruinous power continued to ring out unabated, with Ning continuing to fight while fleeing. Every so often, a streak of Autarch-level golden light would shoot out, tearing through the earth and gouging unfathomably deep tunnels in the ground. As for the wide-scale attacks that covered as much as ten billion kilometers, they would terrify even most Hegemons.

Any other cultivator would’ve perished long ago from a battle like this. Only the Autarchs and Ning were equipped to handle it.

“The Flameland Elder Hall has nearly been utterly exhausted of all its power. It only has enough to keep flying.” Hawktang gritted his teeth after saying these words. His voice echoed throughout the entire Elder Hall, with every single Emperor and Hegemon inside hearing them. “We have lost this battle. The only thing we have left is a final charge.”

Hawktang felt pain and sorrow in his heart, because he knew that this final charge would result in his comrades throwing their lives away. The cultivators... the Sithe... Hawktang wasn’t sure who he truly belonged to, but he knew that the people he cared the most about were his comrades, the other Sithe descendants. And yet, his care alone wouldn’t be of any

use. He couldn't disobey Exalt Bowenya's orders. Every single Hegemon and Emperor had long ago sworn oaths to obey Exalt Bowenya.

"The final charge."

"Attack! Even as we die, let's use up more of Daolord Darknorth's power. Exhaust him!"

"Kill him, and we'll bring hope to our homeland. Once we die, it'll all be for nothing."

"Kill!"

"Hawkefang, you stay back. So long as you are alive, the others will still have a leader!" The Hegemons and Emperors began to charge out of the Flameland Elder Hall, moving like streaks of light towards Ning as they tried to dissuade Hawkefang from joining the battle.

Chapter 11: A Wonderful Surprise

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 11 – A Wonderful Surprise

Streaks of light flew out from the Flameland Elder Hall. The Sithe descendants were absolutely fearless, and they charged out with a mixture of both frenzy and despair.

Hawktfang silently watched from afar. He suddenly had the feeling that those streaks of light were utterly beautiful... yet at the same time, they stabbed against his heart like daggers. In truth, the torment he had felt in his heart over the course of many aeons had been utterly excruciating. This was why he had never been able to perfect his Dao-heart!

“Death is a form of release. My friends... if all of you die, what would be the point of me surviving by myself? To continue being a disposable pawn to the Sithe?” A calm look appeared in Hawktfang’s eyes, and he began to release the two monsters trapped within the Flameland Elder Hall. Clack clack clack clack... the prison cells located within the deepest depths of the Elder Hall began to swing open, awakening two mighty creatures that had existed since antiquity.

Boom. Boom. Boom. The entire Flameland Elder Hall began to shake. After awakening, the two strange creatures instantly entered a berserk state. It was extremely hard to control these creatures, but somewhat easier to drive them so berserk that they would attack all foes before them.

The Sithe generally treated these creatures as their final trump cards. The creatures were sent out to fight only when the Sithe were on their last legs.

“They’ve all gone.” Hawktfang watched those hundreds of streaks of light shot from the Flameland Elder Hall towards the distant region covered by the Sword Dao Domain... but those who entered it disappeared without a trace.

“I’ll go as well.” Hawktfang could sense those two creatures beginning to awaken and cause destruction. The power within his Daoguard Tower had

finally been used up. Without any energy to power its artifacts and formations, the Daoguard Tower was completely incapable of restraining these two mighty beasts any further. The two were beginning to tear it apart... and in truth, Hawkfang didn't care.

He had already committed himself irrevocably to this path once he had split the Elder Hall away from its foundation. Even if the depleted tower wasn't destroyed, it would be of little use; at most, he could detach a few weapons and use them.

"Attack!" Hawkfang shot out like a streak of light, charging with determination towards the distant Ning. He was the last of the Hegemons and Emperors in his group to attack.

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Exalt Bowenya and Jonnbech all watched as those hundreds of streaks of light shot out towards Daolord Darknorth, followed by the final streak of light which represented Hawkfang. Both of them were silent.

As for Ning, he was absolutely delighted. He had long ago put away his castle and was actively manipulating his Sword Dao Domain instead. He flew through the air, moving towards those attacking Emperors as his domain moved with him as well. As soon as the Emperors entered his reach, they were trapped by illusions and captured with ease.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The Hegemons and Emperors continued to launch frenzied attacks, but none of them landed on Ning at all. At most, Ning would have to exert a tiny bit of power to use evasion-arts to dodge. And so... all of the Hegemons and Emperors, Hawkfang included, were captured in one fell swoop. He drew all of them into his estate-world.

"Now that is that?" Just as Ning was feeling quite satisfied with himself and preparing to review the memories of these Hegemons, he suddenly turned to stare at the crumbling Flameland Elder Hall with a slightly tense look on his face.

BOOM! A giant hole appeared in the side of the Flameland Elder Hall, followed by a creature that looked like a giant fish flying out of the opening. The giant fish quickly expanded in size when it flew out,

expanding to become thirty thousand kilometers long. It had long whiskers around its mouth, and those whiskers were all ten thousand kilometers as well. It also had a total of eighteen sets of claws located alongside its flank. As for its tail, the tip of its tail was connected to a series of slender threads which chopped through space with terrifying power as they swished back and forth.

“What an incredible beast.” Ning felt a sense of threat. “I have the feeling that it is even tougher to deal with than the last beast I encountered.”

Squish. Squish. Squish. Right at this moment, another strange creature that looked something like an earthworm began to slowly ooze its way out of the main gates of the Flameland Elder Hall. The creature emanated a halo of golden light, and when Ning saw it he immediately had the feeling that its body was incredibly tough. Even if Ning chopped it into ten pieces, it probably still wouldn’t die. Killing it would be no easy task.

“I need to find their essence cores before I can kill them,” Ning mused. “But both are extremely hard to deal with. It’ll probably take me ten or twenty strikes to kill them... but why should I have to?”

Ning exert his will as he landed upon the ground beneath him. He had already flown out of the Sacred Mountains and into an empty plains, and when he landed on the plains he exerted the power of his Illusion Sword Dao, vanishing without a trace. He was using his illusions to blend into his surroundings, completely masking his aura and revealing no traces of his presence at all.

“Kill... kill... kill...” These two creatures came from outside the Chaosverse, and they were born with incredibly powerful bodies. Their eyes were filled with savagery as they scanned the area, searching for living beings to kill. And yet... after doing so, they ended up turning and charging towards the two remaining Elder Halls instead! Both of those Elder Halls were easily locatable, and they could sense that both held living beings within them.

“Damn! It really was all an illusion. Daolord Darknorth’s illusions are

truly...” Exalt Bowenya turned pale when he saw this. These were clearly HIS beasts, but upon being unable to find Ning they chose to charge towards him instead!

They had captured these beasts and driven them berserk. For these beasts to now attack them was a form of karma.

Boom! Squish! The two creatures parted ways, separating as they moved towards the two Elder Halls. They began to launch a frenzied barrage of attacks upon their respective Elder Halls. Their mighty bodies contained an even more massive amount of energy than Flamewing! It gave them all the power they needed to furiously assault the towers to give vent to their hate. They even opened their giant mouths to bite down at the towers... but the two Elder Halls would not be so easily shaken by the likes of them!

Boom! Boom! Boom! The two Elder Halls began to counter-attack with near-Autarch levels of might. The attacks left gaping wounds on the bodies of the two creatures. The earthworm creature was able to endure nearly a hundred blows before finally being blasted apart, at which point its essence core was destroyed and it perished. As for the giant fish, when it was on the verge of dying it actually came back to its senses and bored into the earth to flee.

“It regained its mind?” Exalt Bowenya was quite shocked. “We had driven it completely insane, but it somehow managed to come back to its senses. Near-death experiences truly can give birth to miracles.”

He didn’t worry about that giant fish-creature too much, because the Sacred Realm was so stable that there was no way the creature would be able to break free and escape from it. After he dealt with the biggest problem, ‘Daolord Darknorth’, he would have plenty of time to handle the fish and recapture it.

“Daolord Darknorth.” Exalt Bowenya stared off into the distance, his gaze focused upon the plains where Ning had vanished. Daolord Darknorth was a thousand times more dangerous than that giant fish!

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Ning had hidden himself via his power over illusions. And upon doing so

he had immediately summoned Hawkfang.

Hawkfang had been someone whom the Sithe had held great hopes for. He had a chance of becoming an Autarch, and was the son of a Sithe Exalt. Ning had searched the memories of over 2,800 Sithe Emperors to no avail. By now, he felt certain that his chances of finding those nine techniques in the memories of ordinary Emperors were extremely slim. Hawkfang, however, was special. Perhaps he might have something.

Whoosh. The black-robed Hawkfang appeared before Ning. His gaze was calm, and he even smiled slightly when he saw Ning appear before him. “Daolord Darknorth.”

Ning didn’t say anything, immediately drawing Hawkfang into an illusion. He was afraid that Hawkfang would try to commit suicide in the hopes of killing him. If that happened, Ning wouldn’t have a chance to search his memories. They would have plenty of time to chat later. The nine techniques, however, were absolutely critical to him and his hopes of proceeding further along the path of cultivation. He wouldn’t take any risks with that.

“This is certainly a great deal of memories.” Ning began to review Hawkfang’s memories. Hawkfang’s Dao-heart was flawed, and so he wasn’t able to resist Ning’s illusions.

Ning couldn’t help but sigh as he flipped through Hawkfang’s memories. Hawkfang was a rather tragic figure. If he had been born amongst the cultivators, he probably would’ve already become an Autarch.

“What?! He also swore a lifeblood oath not to transmit the nine techniques to anyone?” Ning felt rather speechless when he saw the thought-bubbles surrounding those nine techniques. He had expected this, but he had still been hoping that Hawkfang would be different. In truth, however... every single Sithe given access to these techniques had been forced to swear lifeblood oaths. Hawkfang was no exception.

“Ugh.” Ning felt rather disappointed after being unable to access the nine techniques, but he continued to flip through Hawkfang’s other memories.

Time slowly flowed on. Two hours. Four hours...

“What’s this?” Ning’s eyes slowly began to light up as he began to flip through the memories faster and faster. The more he saw, the more excited he became... and towards the end, he was so excited that his entire body was quivering.

“The [Five Truncheon Chapters]!”

Chapter 12: The [Five Truncheon Chapters]

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 12 – The [Five Truncheon Chapters]

“Now this is an unexpected surprise!” Due to his repeated failures, Ji Ning was already at the verge of abandoning all hope of finding the nine special techniques. He was simply rifling through the rest of Hawkfang’s memories out of a sense of caution. Who would’ve thought that such an unexpected surprise would pop out!

Hawkfang was the creator of the [Five Truncheon Chapters]. He truly was a genius!

After Hawkfang’s father had accompanied the Sithe army in their first invasion of the Chaosverse, he began to live here within this hidden dimension. Later on, the supreme Sithe leaders sent orders for the Sithe to begin to propagate within this land. As for Hawkfang’s father, he was an Exalt, but the one and only child he had upon reaching this level was Hawkfang. He began to put all of his efforts into rearing his son.

Hawkfang was incredibly talented in every respect, and he skyrocketed in power with no pause at all! However... he was still just a Sithe descendant. The true Sithe couldn’t help but feel a sense of caution towards these descendants, and so they weren’t willing to pass down any information or guidance regarding Omega Daos! If one of their children managed to reach Autarchy via an Omega Dao, it would be their children who would become the rulers of this Chaosverse... which meant that it would still be suited for the current cultivators, not the Sithe.

The Sithe descendants were much like the local cultivators, after all. They were born and bred under the current conditions.

In addition, if someone reached Autarchy via an Omega Dao, not even a lifeblood oath would be able to restrain or affect him. The Sithe were afraid that they would no longer be able to control such a person, and so

they didn't pass down any Omega daos.

Hawkfang was incredibly talented. Guided by the Sithe away from the Omega Daos, he succeeded in the Daomerge and became a mere Hegemon.

In truth, this was perhaps a lucky thing for Hawkfang. Ning didn't have any guidance as he walked the path of the Omega Sword Dao, but the difficulty of the Daomerge resulted in him failing at it.

Becoming a Hegemon... it was hard to say if it was a 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing for Hawkfang. After becoming a Hegemon, he had quickly reached Hegemony in five other Daos. His speed of advancement was so shockingly fast that it had amazed the entire Sithe race! Even the highest ranking members of the Sithe paid close attention to him.

Later on, the Dawn War began! Hawkfang's father, as an Exalt, was required to lead the Sithe forces into battle! Hawkfang insisted on accompanying his father into battle. As one of the most favored Sithe descendants, he had a somewhat special status, and so the highest level Sithe reluctantly agreed to his request. However, they only agreed to let him send his avatar, as they knew the war would be so fierce that Hawkfang could very well die in it.

The entire Sithe race was eagerly awaiting an Autarch arising from within the ranks of their children!

During the war, Hawkfang's avatar accompanied his father in battling against the cultivators. He saw many things... and slowly, he began to realize the truth!

"You imbeciles! Can't you feel it? Can't you sense the difference between you and the Sithe? It was this vast Chaosverse which gave birth to you, nurtured you, supported you! The primordial chaos of this universe accepts you but rejects the Sithe, because the Sithe are foreign invaders and enemies. You are helping your own enemies!

"You are cultivators! Why do you willingly serve the Sithe?!"

Autarch Bolin had charged towards them, roaring with accusation and

fury. Hawkfang had long ago suspected the truth... and on that day, he became certain of it.

“Fang, my son.” His father had sought him out that day. “We’re quite unlucky to have run into one of the cultivator Autarchs so soon. We’re going to die today. I’ll destroy your avatar to ensure that this Autarch won’t be able to kill you. Every single one of his strikes is filled with the binding power of karma. If he kills you, he’ll use karma to destroy your true body as well.”

“Father... I am a cultivator, not a Sithe. Right?” Hawkfang asked.

Ning was looking through Hawkfang’s memories and could see through Hawkfang’s eyes. He saw the look on the face of Hawkfang’s father... and that look shook even Ning’s own heart.

Hawkfang’s father had fallen silent for a moment. He then looked at his son, his eyes filled with mixed emotions. Heartache, love, worry, hope...

These were the pure emotions a dying father would feel when gazing at his son.

Hawkfang’s father had then said softly, “I might as well tell you. I was bound by oaths not to reveal this to you, but now you already know the truth. I... I didn’t have a choice. I had to take part in this war and just hope for the best. You don’t have a choice either. The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate.”

When Hawkfang’s father had said these words, his eyes had become filled with resentment. He had then let out a sigh: “If you can become an Autarch, the Sithe wouldn’t dare to mistreat you. You’d be considered one of their important thugs... but if you fail to make that breakthrough and remain a mere Hegemon, you wouldn’t even be considered a thug, just a disposable pawn. I was able to protect you, but I’m going to die soon. I won’t be able to protect you any longer. If you ever have the chance... flee. Escape and go to the cultivator civilizations.”

Hawkfang had been stunned. He never would have imagined that his father would tell him to go flee to the cultivators.

“Alright. We’re out of time.” Hawkfang’s father had then reached out and pressed his hand against Hawkfang’s chest, destroying Hawkfang’s avatar with one blow... and that was the last memory Hawkfang had of his father.

The end result of that battle... was Autarch Bolin exterminating the entire squad led by Hawkfang’s father.

.....

Eventually, the Dawn War came to an end. Hawkfang continued to live within the Sacred Realm inside the hidden dimension. At first, the Sithe continued to pay close attention to him... but the shadow that had been cast over his heart made it so that he would be unable to cleanse his Dao-heart of all flaws.

He was a cultivator, but he was also a descendant of the Sithe. If the Sithe had treated him with sincerity, he wouldn’t feel so torn... but in reality, he now knew that they were nothing more than cannon fodder and pawns. Even if he worked extremely hard and became an Autarch, he’d be viewed as nothing more than a useful thug.

What was the point of cultivating?

And... he was forever unable to forget his father’s final words: “I didn’t have a choice. I had to take part in this war and just hope for the best. You don’t have a choice either. The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate.”

These words tore at his heart. Ever since his mother had died due to her lifespan coming to an end, his father had become the person who he cared about above all others. His father, in turn, had cherished him and loved him.

Only when he heard those words did he realize how miserably unhappy his father had been. His father had the exalted title of ‘Exalt’, but he had been given no choices either. He had only come to take part in this war because he had to, and his fate had been left up to luck.

“Sithe...”

“SITHE!!!!” Hawkfang began to feel hatred towards the Sithe race, which treated both himself and his father as disposable pawns. This hatred cast a shadow over his heart, preventing him from perfecting his Dao-heart. He knew that he had to become more powerful and become an Autarch, as it would give him a better chance of escaping and taking revenge upon the Sithe... but he could no longer perfect his Dao-heart. In fact, he couldn't improve at all.

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After no longer being able to progress on the path of cultivation, Hawkfang eventually began to give up on his hopes of Autarchy. However, he then came up with another idea for taking revenge upon the Sithe!

He knew that the Sithe had long ago transmitted nine special techniques to their descendants, wanting to make cultivation easier for them. These techniques allowed divine power and Immortal energy to be merged together, theoretically ensuring that even Daolords would no longer face mortal danger as they took their various steps. Even if you failed in the Daomerge, you would be able to quickly recover and then attempt it again! This was the reason why the Sithe were able to produce so many Hegemons, Emperors, and Exalts.

“The Sithe continuously improved as they created these nine techniques, with the ninth being much better than the first. But in the end? Even the ninth and ultimate technique remained flawed. It only allowed for one to become a Daolord of the First Step, at which point the body would crumble and the truesoul would vanish.

“I can sense that these techniques are somewhat rejected by the natural ‘Dao’ of this Chaosverse. If I can retrofit them, I should be able to produce something better.”

True Sithe were unable to sense or make use of the Dao of this Chaosverse... but Hawkfang could!

It was absolutely incredible that the Sithe Lord of Chaos was able to create a technique which would allow a local cultivator to safely become a Daolord, even though the Lord of Chaos himself was unable to sense the

Dao here. Hawkfang had personally viewed all nine of the techniques in the past, and he had watched as the almighty Sithe Lord of Chaos had slowly improved and perfected them. Hawkfang had gained many new insights as he had watched... and so, he had chosen to make use of those insights into creating his own techniques.

He had felt certain that all nine Sithe techniques contained fundamental, foundational errors. The only reason why those errors weren't apparent early on was because when one was weak, there was a great deal of margin for error.

For example, consider mortal cultivators. 'Foundation level', 'Golden Core level', 'Nascent Soul level'... 'Mortal-ranked', 'Earth-ranked', 'Heaven-ranked'... 'Wanxiang Adept', 'Primal Daoist', 'Void level'... all sorts of techniques and styles could be used, because the weaker you were the less of an impact the Chaosverse's Dao would have upon you. But the closer to the peak you were, the more demanding the Dao would become.

Hawkfang himself was able to sense the Dao of this Chaosverse. He borrowed some of the technical tricks and ideas used by the nine special techniques, then began to recreate them in his own image, devising the [Mortal Chapter], [Fiendgod Chapter], [World Chapter], [Daolord Chapter], and [Deathless Chapter].

This became the technique which he named the [Five Truncheon Chapters]. The reason why he called it the [Five Truncheon Chapters] was because his father's favorite magic treasure had been a wooden truncheon. As a child, Hawkfang had loved to play around with that truncheon, and so his father had given it to him. Hawkfang had always carried it by his side, and it became a symbol of the love he bore for his father.

Chapter 13: Deathless

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 13 – Deathless

Hawkfang had created this technique in order to take revenge upon the Sithe. He wanted to take revenge for both his father's sake and his own sake, and for the sake of the countless deceived Sithe descendants! They were viewed as disposable cannon fodder by the true Sithe, while even his father had been forced to take part in the war.

"The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate." These words continued to stab against Hawkfang's heart like knives. He would never be able to forget that look on his father's face. This was why he needed revenge.

He wanted to create this technique, then find a way to deliver it to the cultivators! He felt certain that the cultivators would be able to use it to dramatically increase in power, producing many new Hegemons and even new Autarchs. That way, the Sithe would be defeated.

But of course, if the Sithe found out that he was creating this technique, he would be doomed! Thus, he had carried out all of his experiments upon the beings who resided within his own estate-treasure. As a Hegemon, he had many estate-treasures which were filled with countless living beings. He had these beings test out his cultivation techniques, and many ended up dying due to errors in the technique. He had tested them time and time again, then remade them repeatedly.

His talent was put to full effect here. He quickly mastered the [Mortal Chapter] and the [Fiendgod Chapter]. The first was comparable to pre-Celestial Tribulation levels of the Three Realms, while the second included everything post-tribulation to the Elder God/Ancestral Immortal level.

Although it was different from the way in which the nine techniques operated, it was successful and had a similar effect to Ning's own azureflower seal technique.

The [World Chapter] covered World Gods and Chaos Immortals. It was clearly far more difficult, and it took him a great deal of time... but in the

end, he succeeded once more.

The [Daolord Chapter], however, was even more difficult. It must be remembered that even the finest of the nine special techniques only allowed for cultivators to safely train to the World level. Once one became a Daolord of the First Step, the body would crumble apart and the truesoul would be destroyed.

Hawktfang spent untold aeons working on the [Daolord Chapter], and to this very day he was still working on it. Alas, he had only been able to successfully complete the parts for Daolords of the First Step and Daolords of the Second Step. He hadn't been able to succeed for the third or fourth steps!

Due to being stymied by the [Daolord Chapter], he had turned his attention to the [Deathless Chapter] instead. The [Deathless Chapter] was meant to allow Daolords who had failed in the Daomerge to halt and reverse the crumbling of the truesoul, allowing them to then attempt the Daomerge once more.

All nine of the Sithe techniques were also focused on recovering from a failed Daomerge.

“Mortal cultivators who reach a certain level can be reborn from a single drop of blood. Upon reaching the ‘Fiendgod’ level, they will not die so long as their truesoul remains unharmed. However... if there was a way which would allow a shattered truesoul, the very core of a person's being, to be repaired after already breaking apart? That would represent true deathlessness. The only thing which could end one's life would be when the invisible laws that govern everyone's maximum lifespan in a Chaosverse took effect.” And so, Hawktfang had focused his efforts on the [Deathless Chapter].

He allowed the Daolords residing in his estate-treasures who had failed the Daomerge to test out this technique. He had gone so far as to recruit many disciples in the Sacred Realm. After those Daolord disciples failed the Daomerge, he would have them go into his estate-treasure and test out the [Deathless Chapter]... but of course, he would have them swear oaths

not to divulge this to anyone else.

He had refined the [Deathless Chapter] over and over again, but to this very day, it remained a failure! Clearly, it was almost completely impossible to allow a Daolord who had failed the Daomerge to repair his crumbling truesoul.

Thus, only the first three chapters of the [Five Truncheon Chapters] were complete. The [Daolord Chapter] and the [Deathless Chapter] were both flawed and imperfect... but in truth, both were significantly superior to the nine unique techniques the Sithe had developed. It wasn't that Hawktfang was more talented than the Sithe Lord of Chaos; rather, it was that he was able to use those nine techniques as a reference, and was also able to sense the Dao of this Chaosverse.

If the Sithe Lord of Chaos was also able to sense the Dao of this Chaosverse, he probably would've been able to easily create a perfect technique which would allow someone to train all the way to the Autarch level.

.....

Ning was extremely excited, especially after reviewing the [Deathless Chapter]. As Ning reviewed the technique, he couldn't help but get the feeling that there were certain similarities to the mysteries of the Nine Chaos Seals which Autarch Awakener had created.

It was like a brand new door had appeared in front of Ning, one which allowed limitless possibilities in a brand new world.

The Sithe Lord of Chaos was at such an extremely high level of insight that he was able to create these nine techniques just based on guesswork and prediction. He had overhauled them and repeatedly perfected them, but they remained flawed. This, however, was because his understanding of the nature of this Chaosverse's Dao was limited. If the Dao had operated in the manner he had believed it to operate, the nine techniques would've been perfect. Alas, the Dao was different and so the nine techniques were unusable. Hawktfang, however, had managed to use them to create his own [Deathless Chapter].

“I can see hope. There are many ways we can continue to improve the [Deathless Chapter].” Ning was different from Hawkfang. He was the master of the Eternal Omega Sword Dao, on par with Autarchs in terms of insight. He had reached an incredibly high level of understanding into the Dao, which was why he was able to reach Hegemony in so many Daos with such ease.

“But the path to perfecting it will be a long one. If I let Hawkfang do it, he probably wouldn’t succeed even if he was given ten times as much time as he already had.” Autarch Awakener had attempted to complete this path, but he had approached it from a different angle. He had been able to reach an extremely deep level of mastery in his approach, which was why Ning was certain that the [Deathless Chapter] held many flaws.

However... it was a different approach that would provide many new inspirations. In addition, he was able to see a complete ‘structure’ to the [Deathless Chapter].

“The experiences of Autarch Awakener, combined with the mysteries of the [Deathless Chapter]... if I fused them together and then worked hard on improving them, I might be able to create a perfect technique in my remaining years which would allow my crumbling truesoul to recover.” Ning instantly grew excited. If he could heal his truesoul... then if he attempted the Daomerge again, he would instantly become an Eternal Emperor because he was already the master of the Eternal Omega Sword Dao!

But of course... he would first have to create a new technique which would allow the truesoul to become deathless and everlasting.

“I can definitely succeed. I will definitely succeed!” Ning was filled with anticipation.

Prior to acquiring the [Deathless Chapter], Ning had felt that his chances of creating such a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique to be virtually negligible. Now, however? Hope blazed in front of him like a radiant sun. It was still a distant goal, but it was bright enough to illuminate the path in front of it.

Autarch Titanos and the others had felt that there was no hope because they didn't even know what path to begin embarking on! The [Deathless Chapter], however, was based off the nine special techniques and so it provided an overall framework and 'path', even though this path was filled with many pitfalls and dead ends. This was why the Sithe had forced anyone who ever learned the nine techniques to swear lifeblood oaths not to divulge it to anyone else.

They were afraid that the nine techniques would be disseminated to the cultivators, accelerating their research efforts into this same field.

"Hawktfang, I truly have to thank you." Ning stared at Hawktfang, who was still in a dazed and illusion-bound state in front of him, then smiled. After completely reviewing Hawktfang's memories, Ning felt that this trip to this hidden dimension had been completely worth it!

"Awaken," Ning murmured softly.

Hawktfang trembled slightly. Moments later, his eyes regained their usual clarity. He looked at Ning, blinked, and then smiled slightly. "Daolord Darknorth, was I in an illusion just now?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"You've already reviewed my memories?" Hawktfang asked.

Ning nodded.

Hawktfang continued, "I've always felt quite torn between the Sithe and the cultivators. The blood in my veins belongs to the Sithe and comes from my father! And yet, I am indeed a local cultivator myself. Life has been quite agonizing... but one thing is certain. I hate the Sithe! I hate them for forcing my father into war, and hate them for sending all of us, their children, to our deaths. Now you have my [Five Truncheon Chapters], a technique I poured my heart and soul into. In the end, I still wasn't able to truly complete them. However... after you cultivators acquire them, I'm certain that you'll be able to create a perfect technique."

"Thank you," Ning said. "The entire cultivator civilization owes you thanks, and I owe you more than anyone else."

“You?” Hawkfang blinked, then laughed. “Do you thank me because you have failed the Daomerge? But creating a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique will be extremely difficult. This is the hardest part of the entire set, Daolord Darknorth! You are incredibly talented, but you don’t have much time left, while perfecting the technique will be extremely difficult. The Autarchs weren’t able to accomplish it, while I was only able to do what I did thanks to having studied those nine unique techniques. Even though you’ll be able to learn from what I created... I’m afraid that it’ll still take you a million or even tens of millions of chaos cycles before you are able to succeed.”

“At least I can give it a shot before I die.” Ning smiled. “If I succeed, I’ll be able to keep living.”

Hawkfang smiled as well.

“Is there anything you want from me?” Ning asked. “I’ll do anything which is within my power.”

“I don’t need much. If you do win, take away all of the descendants from my homeland and give them a safe, remote location which will be far away from the terrifying clash of civilizations. I’ll find a quiet place for myself and live out a peaceful life.” Hawkfang smiled. “But of course, that’s only if you win. If you lose, all of this talk will have been for nothing.”

Chapter 14: Before the Battle

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 14 – Before the Battle

Although Ji Ning had already acquired the technique he was searching for, the [Five Truncheon Chapters], he still continued flipping through the memories of all the other Hegemons and Emperors he had captured. He wanted to try and find more Sithe secrets that might be of help to the cultivators.

After a full year concluded, Ning once more flew towards the Sacred Mountains...

“He’s coming.” Exalt Bowenya stared from afar, his gaze ice-cold.

“Daolord Darknorth has already appeared. We cannot shirk back from this fight. Our only options are to win glory for ourselves by killing Daolord Darknorth... or dying in battle.” Jonnbach was standing outside the Iceland Elder Hall, radiating the desire to do battle. Behind him were nearly four hundred Hegemons and Emperors, the vast majority of whom were all true Sithe.

“Do you want to die?” Jonnbach’s voice was placid, but it echoed throughout the hall. The true Sithe and the Sithe descendants were all silent, but their eyes were filled with berserk looks.

“Good. Let’s begin.” Accompanying Jonnbach’s orders, the towering Iceland Elder Hall began to shake and rumble as it broke free from its own foundation.

The white-robed Ning was soaring through the skies towards them. Now, the vast Iceland Elder Hall was soaring into the air as well.

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“At most, they’ll force me to waste a bit of extra time.” Thanks to his Illusion Sword Dao, Ning would be able to win this fight quite easily. None of them could see through his illusions.

His Sword Dao Domain was able cover an area of over a billion kilometers, and this entire area would be transformed into an illusory

realm! Wide-range attacks could hit him, but they would be weak enough that Ning could just hide inside his treasures and defend against them with ease. Focused attacks were powerful, but there was no way they would be able to locate the true Ning within this region of a billion kilometers.

“If I had already mastered the Illusion Sword Dao while I was fighting in Purgatory, I wouldn’t have needed to use my Storm Sword Dao to evade those attacks when fighting that first castle. The Illusion Sword Dao would’ve been enough to make it impossible for my opponents to locate me, much less stop me. Same with that spacetime formation; I still would’ve been trapped, but the Illusion Sword Dao would’ve made it impossible for them to injure me.”

Ning couldn’t help but sigh. During the battle in the spacetime formation, he had sacrificed many precious treasures and had to strike eighteen times before he was able to escape. What a waste! If he had already mastered the Illusion Sword Dao, he could’ve relaxed within the confines of that formation. His opponents wouldn’t have been able to touch him!

Alas, Ning had no idea back then that the Illusion Sword Dao would prove to be so effective. It was of very little use against other Autarch-level experts, after all... but against hordes of weaker Emperors and Hegemons? It was absolutely crushing! They wouldn’t even be able to locate him, much less strike him.

“It is nearly time.” Ning sipped from a glass of wine as he stared outside of the star-treasure he was in towards the approaching Iceland Elder Hall.

“Master, it seems as though we stand a good chance at escaping,” Azurefiend’s avatar said excitedly.

“The Flameland Elder Hall and the Iceland Elder Hall both voluntarily abandoned their foundations in order to attack me. That’s why they aren’t that dangerous. But the remaining Daoguard Tower which is owned by Exalt Bowenya... now that is a different story.” Ning shook his head. “The central control mechanisms for this entire hidden dimension are located

within that Daoguard Tower, which means I have to actually go inside it. The danger level inside a Daoguard Tower is completely different.”

“You have to be careful, Master,” Azurefiend’s avatar said. The more time he spent with Ning, the more admiration he felt, especially when he saw how almost nothing could shake Ning’s Dao-heart and how calm Ning was in the face of even the greatest of dangers. Azurefiend himself was not capable of this.

“Attack! Kill Daolord Darknorth! Kill him and we’ll be rewarded heavily. Even if we die, we’ll be revived through spacetime inversion and then be graced with many gifts! If we can’t kill him, at least we can tire him out a bit. Next, Exalt Bowenya will personally deal with him! So long as the Exalt succeeds, we’ll still be brought back.”

“ATTACK!” Jonnbech howled. His only hope was to render enough merits to the Sithe that he would be revived via spacetime inversion... because he knew that they were definitely going to die during this battle against this terrifying Daolord.

“Let’s go!”

“Attack!” All the Hegemons and Emperors charged forwards madly, including both the true Sithe and the Sithe descendants. If they charged and attacked, at least they would have a tiny chance at surviving this. Anyone who dared to try and flee would be put to death in accordance to Sithe laws, never to be revived again.

“They clearly know that they have no chance against me. They are like mantises waving their arms in front of a cart and seeking to stop it, but they still show no signs of fear at all.” Ning couldn’t help but feel a slight sense of trepidation when he gazed upon the hundreds of berserk Hegemons and Emperors. “Hawkefang’s memories indicate that even Sithe Exalts like his father were all forced to take part in this war. Life amongst the Sithe certainly is brutal.”

Whoosh. Ning used the power of his Illusion Sword Dao against the rampaging Hegemons who were charging towards him as the battle began.

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Within the final Elder Hall, the brightest one of the three. The blue-robed, blue-haired Bowenya was standing there, calmly watching the battle from afar.

He didn't care about the deaths of the Hegemons and the Emperors. He only cared about one thing... success!

"If they die, they die. So long as we can kill Daolord Darknorth and swallow up his truesoul, I'll have rendered the greatest merit anyone has accomplished since our invasion into this Chaosverse! I'll be given true freedom, and many other gifts as well." Exalt Bowenya stared intently at the distant white-robed youth. "This is in accordance with the rules which our leader personally wrote down. There's no way he would go back on his word."

"We have to kill him." Bowenya's eyes were filled with savagery as well. Hawkefang? Jonnbech? Even if they died... even if this entire hidden dimension was destroyed... he wouldn't care one bit! The only thing which mattered was killing Ning and then swallowing up his truesoul.

According to what their leader had said, the higher your status and the more karmic luck you had, the more the Quintessence of the Chaosverse would dote upon you! The person before Bowenya was the first master of an Eternal Omega Sword Dao this Chaosverse had ever seen. Even though he had failed his Daomerge, he would remain beloved by this Chaosverse and would be blessed with tremendous karmic luck and tremendous power.

Similarly, during the era of the Three Realms, its most talented experts such as Nuwa and Ning would all be blessed and reinforced by the power of the Three Realms. The same was true for the Chaosverse as a whole. The most talented denizens of the Chaosverse would be blessed with tremendous karmic luck. This was true for both the Autarchs and Ning! If any of them were slain and their truesouls devoured, it would be a tremendous blow to this Chaosverse as a whole!

If Ning had died under ordinary circumstances, such as his truesoul

naturally dissipating, then his truesoul fragments would make their way back into the prime essences of the Chaosverse. But if he was killed by the Sithe, then had his truesoul fragments devoured in accordance with those secret Sithe truesoul-swallowing techniques, there would be no way for his truesoul fragments to go back to this Chaosverse.

This was why Bowenya had to kill Ning, rather than just trap him and let him slowly die a normal death. And... killing Ning would be an even greater accomplishment than killing an ordinary Autarch!

This was because the Sithe leadership knew that while ordinary Autarchs were unable to improve any further, those who were in control of an Eternal Omega Dao could very well take that final step and become an Omega Autarch, resulting in a new Lord of Chaos being born. The Sithe would stop at nothing to kill Ning! Even though he had failed his Daomerge, they would still be worried that someone as brilliant as him might be able to come up with a way to devise a 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique.

The sooner they killed him, the better.

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After capturing Jonnbech and the others, Ning inspected all of their memories. However, the only unexpected surprises came from Jonnbech himself. Jonnbech actually had a perfect Dao-heart, and so the illusions formed from the Sword Dao Domain were not enough to control his mind. Ning was forced to use some of his own power and use a secret art in order to draw Jonnbech into an illusion, then rifle through his memories.

Ning was quite delighted by what he found. Jonnbech, as someone who had a perfect Dao-heart, was a very high-ranking Sithe. He was far more important than the vast majority of Hegemons, and was given the best resources in the hope that he would become an Exalt! As a result, he had viewed many different techniques which were meant to aid Hegemons in breaking through to Autarchy. Some required lifeblood oaths to be sworn not to divulge them to outsiders, while others Jonnbech had found on his own. The latter didn't require any oaths, and so Ning managed to uncover

quite a few techniques which not even Autarch Titanos or Autarch Awakener had been able to acquire.

“This is an unexpected surprise. And... it seems that Jonnbech’s home truly had many powerful experts within it.” Ning found quite a few memories pertaining to the Sithe Chaosverse as well. There, the ‘Exalts’ were truly Autarchs in power.

But of course, there were differences in power amongst the Autarchs as well. Some reached Autarchy as Heartforce Cultivators, while others reached Autarchy through the Dao of the Sword, the Dao of Spacetime, the Dao of Space, and more. Some reached Autarchy through the Dao of Metal, while other reached Autarchy through the Dao of the Five Elements.

Different Daos would result in different levels of power. Those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of Space, for example, would be a bit weaker than those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of Spacetime. In turn, those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of the Five Elements would be even more powerful.

Alas, all memories pertaining to the secrets of the Omega Daos were sealed by lifeblood oaths. Even so, Ning’s horizons were considerably expanded. He actually gained new insights into his own path of cultivation as well.

“I don’t have enough time as a cultivator of the Dao of the Sword. Reaching Autarchy via my Omega Sword Dao before my truesoul crumbles is nothing more than a vain dream. I don’t have nearly enough time; in fact, I probably won’t even be able to finish my Karma Sword Dao! I need to focus all of my efforts on creating the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique.”

Chapter 15: Deadlock

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 15 – Deadlock

Crunch. Crunch. Clack!

Within a gorge inside the Sacred Realm. Ji Ning was standing next to the Iceland Elder Hall, using his Sword Dao Domain to break it apart and deconstruct it. The Iceland Elder Hall was devoid of all power, and so he was able to break it apart quite quickly.

“Daolord Darknorth, why are you wasting time breaking apart a useless Daoguard Tower? Is it perhaps because of how pathetically impoverished all you cultivators are? During the last war we fought against you cultivators, your kind did the same thing in frantically scavenging for any scraps you could find.” The heavens echoed with a cold, mocking laugh.

“I’m in no rush,” Ning murmured calmly.

“Hmph. Then go ahead and keep on breaking it apart,” the icy voice replied coldly.

That was exactly what Ning did. He continued to break the Daoguard Tower apart piece-by-piece, and he carefully scrutinized every inch of it. This was the first time he had a chance to inspect an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower up close! His next action was to enter Exalt Bowenya’s Elder Hall. Given that all Daoguard Towers shared certain commonalities in construction, deconstructing and inspecting this one was a form of preparation for him.

As the saying goes, if you knew yourself and knew your enemies, you would be blessed with victory in all of your battles. The deconstruction of the Iceland Elder Hall was part of Ning efforts to know his enemies.

“A pity that the Flameland Elder Hall was virtually annihilated,” Ning mused to himself.

Twenty-six days went past in the blink of an eye before Ning had finally finished carefully tearing apart the entire Iceland Elder Hall. During this process, he had also discovered a strange beast which had been

slumbering deep within a prison inside the tower. Ning had used his Sword Dao Domain to pick up the sleeping beast, toss it far away, and then use illusions to mask his own location.

As for what happened once the beast woke up? Ning really didn't give a damn.

He had considered drawing it away into his own estate-world, but the creature was too overwhelmingly powerful. Ordinary estate-worlds wouldn't be able to contain its might! It would probably be able to tear through Ning's estate-worlds with ease. Yes, some of the Sithe treasures Ning had might be able to contain it, but Ning didn't want to go through the trouble of doing so. An insane beast was of little value to him.

"Hm." Ning stood within that empty gorge, the Iceland Elder Hall having been completely deconstructed and then put away within an estate-world.

"Exalt-class Daoguard Towers truly are marvelously built up. They require an utterly inconceivable amount of expertise with regards to manipulating space and time. I wager that the blueprints for Exalt-class Daoguard Towers were created by the Sithe Lord of Chaos." Ning was secretly shocked by what he had found. The Iceland Elder Hall had been devoid of all power, and so many of its powerful functions had become inert and hidden... and yet, Ning was still able to see how incredibly powerful and complex it was based on how it had been created.

"Now what should I do? Given my current level of power, if I actually tried to barge my way inside one of these things, my chances would be quite low." Ning was quite worried. He had never entered a Daoguard Tower before! Now, however, if he wanted to leave this place he would have to pass through the center of this hidden dimension... and that center was located within that Daoguard Tower! He had to enter it... but if he did, he would be in incredible danger.

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Ning transformed into a streak of light as he quickly flew towards that final remaining Elder Hall.

Exalt Bowenya stood within that Elder Hall, staring intently at the streak

of light flying towards him. He murmured softly, "He's coming. Good. My only fear was that you wouldn't come."

A hint of a cold smile appeared on Bowenya's face. "Get ready, everyone. Once Daolord Darknorth enters the tower, you'll be responsible for manning your stations and killing him."

"Understood." The hundreds of Hegemons and Emperors were all ready for this. Some were berserk, some were filled with hate, and some were filled with desire for glory. They had already sacrificed far too much to kill this terrifying Daolord.

Whoosh. The distant Ning suddenly landed on the peak of a mountain less than a billion kilometers away from the tower. A wine-laden table appeared in front of him as he sat down in the lotus position.

"Eh?" Bowenya was flabbergasted.

"Why isn't he coming?" The Hegemons and Emperors behind him all grew worried.

"Bowenya." Between mouthfuls of food and wine, Ning chuckled: "Did you really take me for a fool? This is an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower which has you, an Exalt, in command. You also have hundreds of Hegemons serving as your deathsworn! I'm not so bored with life as to go barging into your Daoguard Tower."

"So what are you saying?" Bowenya's voice rang out.

"Not much. I'm simply not planning to go inside, that's all," Ning said. "Even if I do end up dying, you can forget about swallowing away my truesoul fragments."

Ning knew that if he died at the hands of the Sithe, his truesoul would be devoured instead of returning to the prime essences of the Chaosverse.

Bowenya blinked, while the Hegemons and Emperors behind him grew anxious. "Exalt, what should we do?" "If he doesn't come in, what can we do? He's too powerful. He managed to deal with both of the previous Elder Halls when they moved to attack him!" "Right, w-what should we do?" They were all panicked.

Exalt Bowenya barked, "Shut up!" Instantly, the Elder Hall fell silent. He then frowned and stared at the distant Ning, then said in a cold voice: "Daolord Darknorth! I admire you for your strength. If I fought you in solo combat, I would probably be defeated by you with ease. I have no chance of defeating you if I exit this tower."

"I failed my Daomerge. My truesoul has been crumbling this entire time." Ning sat at the peak of that distant mountain, sipping his wine and smiling. "You are still a Sithe Exalt, after all. It won't be easy for me to kill you, and my lifespan will be dramatically lessened by battling you. Perhaps my truesoul will crumble to the point of collapsing during our battle, in which case you would have won. If you fight, you stand a chance at winning."

"If I come out and fight you, I have a greater-than 90% chance of dying," Bowenya said. "and you, Daolord Darknorth, must know that although killing me won't be easy due to how tough my body is, capturing me would be much simpler. Hmph. I've encountered Omega Emperors before in my own homeland."

Ning raised an eyebrow. It was true. Killing Bowenya would be fairly difficult, as his body and truesoul were both on the Autarch level! It was only because he was a foreign invader that this Chaosverse rejected him and suppressed his power to the level of the Blazesun Ruler. To kill him would take many blows... but simply capturing him would be easier. Ning had already mastered the Space Sword Dao; he could use a blow to wrap Exalt Bowenya within layers of space and then imprison him.

Ning had many different Sword Daos. The Space Sword Dao would be the easiest one for capturing Bowenya.

"That's why I won't go out and fight you," Bowenya continued. "Either you come inside, or I'll just watch you die from afar."

"Watch me die? Then you won't have the chance to be rewarded for this." Ning smirked. "You prepared so many plots to kill me, all for the sake of exhausting me and slaying me so you can swallow up my truesoul. If I just die naturally, you won't get my truesoul."

“My life is more valuable than any reward. The rewards for killing you are great enough that I would be willing to risk my life if I felt my chances were good... but given how slim my chances would be, I won’t be so foolish as to go out and fight you. You are indeed very powerful; my only chance lies in battling within the Daoguard Tower,” Bowenya said. “You were able to use your illusions to defeat the many other traps and treasures I threw your way. Now, only my Daoguard Tower remains. If you come inside, I’ll battle you to the death. If you do not, you can just die outside.”

Bowenya remained quite calm and focused. He cared intensely about staying alive. He could calmly, emotionlessly watch as over 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors perished, including Hawkfang and Jonnbech, but himself? He wasn’t going to throw his life away. He would rather abandon his chance at glory than to risk himself.

Whoosh. Ning transformed into a streak of light and flew towards the Daoguard Tower.

“He’s coming.” Bowenya and the others began to grow excited. The gates to this Elder Hall were wide open. Ning was on par with the Autarchs in power; to him, whether or not the gates were open was really meaningless. He could simply teleport inside even a completely sealed-off castle.

Ning quickly flew next to the Elder Hall. He stared upwards at the towering, twelve-story tower, then reached out with his right hand and gently pressed it against against the surface of the Daoguard Tower. The surface felt rather cool to the touch. Thanks to his mastery over the Metal Sword Dao and the Earth Sword Dao, Ning could sense some of the internal underpinnings of the tower without even having to enter it.

“As I expected, the most dangerous part of an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower lies in the Dao of Spacetime.” Ning secretly frowned. When he had torn apart the Iceland Elder Hall, he had come to this conclusion. He was hoping that perhaps Exalt Bowenya’s Daoguard Tower was different... but in truth, the situation was essentially the same.

The Daoguard Tower looked like a single entity, but it was actually composed of many different spacetime continuums that were fitted

together in extremely marvelous ways. This required an extreme level of mastery of the Dao of Spacetime. If Ning entered, he would need to traverse a veritable maze of spacetime continuums and would probably die midway through.

“If I also managed to master the Time Sword Dao and then merged it together with my Space Sword Dao into the Spacetime Sword Dao, I would be completely confident in my chances,” Ning mused. “Unfortunately, it took me thousands of chaos cycles just to master the Space Sword Dao. The Time Sword Dao is even more difficult. It will probably take me over ten thousand chaos cycles.”

Ning had spend the majority of his three thousand chaos cycles of wandering on the Space Sword Dao, which was why he had been able to master it after entering the Sithelands.

The Space Sword Dao was more difficult than all five of the Five Elements Sword Daos combined. The Time Sword Dao was even more difficult than that!

“I don’t have enough time, but if I go inside while simply relying on the Space Sword Dao, I’m not sure I’ll make it out again.” Ning hesitated.

Chapter 16: Charging Into the Elder Hall

In the end, Ji Ning elected to begin silently training in the Spacetime Sword Dao atop that mountain peak within the Sacred Mountains.

“He’s training AGAIN?”

“This Daolord Darknorth is...!”

Bowenya and the others were so angry, their teeth hurt. Unfortunately, they wouldn’t dare to actually charge out and attack.

Ning had long ago mastered his Space Sword Dao and had reached Hegemony in both the Dao of Space and the Dao of Time.

“The Spacetime Sword Dao...” Ning silently visualized how it could be manifested. Twenty-six chaos cycles went past without him even realizing it.

Finally, Ning opened his eyes and shook his head slightly. He had made significant improvements at first, but now he had reached a major bottleneck and was stuck. He was far from being able to succeed in this Dao, which would most likely take tens of thousands of chaos cycles. He couldn’t waste all of his time here. The ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique was even more important.

“My true body only has six hundred chaos cycles of life left. I have no chance of mastering the Spacetime Sword Dao.” Ning rose to his feet, his eyes flashing sharply. “Then I suppose I’ll just have to take the risk and try to find a chance for myself.”

Ning turned to stare at the distant, towering Elder Hall. “Twenty-six chaos cycles have gone past, but Exalt Bowenya refuses to come out. He’s quite steadfast.” If the Exalt came out, he would almost certainly be defeated. Bowenya cared immensely about his own life; why would he come out?

“He’s coming! He’s coming!”

“He’s headed our way.” Bowenya and the others had been forced to watch as Ning had trained for multiple chaos cycles. Now, Ning was

coming for them once more, but this time they didn't feel too worried.

"Let's see what this Daolord is planning to do," Bowenya said calmly.

Swoosh. Ning reached the Elder Hall, then rested his hand against its outer surface. Moments later, he silently blinked past its outer shell and entered it.

"He came inside!!!" Exalt Bowenya's eyes bulged out in shock. Moments later, they became filled with wild joy as he ordered, "All Hegemons and Emperors, prepare to follow my previous instructions! Stand guard over your stations and attack Daolord Darknorth. Worsen his injuries and make sure he dies within my Daoguard Tower!"

"Yes, Exalt!" The response came from throughout the Daoguard Tower.

"Ahahaha... Daolord Darknorth, you actually dared to come inside, eh? Even your Autarchs would probably be trapped for an extremely long period of time if they dared to enter my Daoguard Tower. You? A Daolord who failed the Daomerge? Haha... you'll definitely die!" Bowenya was filled with confidence. He immediately turned and strode into the air, then vanished without a trace.

Within the very center of the Daoguard Tower was a dark and secluded region. This region was filled with an enormous millstone-like formation-base which was slowly swiveling at all times. It emanated ripples of spacetime, and Bowenya was standing atop it. This was the center of the Daoguard Tower, and the main control mechanism for this entire hidden dimension.

"This time... I, Bowenya, shall have accomplished something incredible for the Sithe! I'll be able to truly transcend my service and gain freedom. Daolord Darknorth, you are going to die!" Bowenya stared towards countless globe-shaped illusions that were in front of him. One of the many globes was displaying a white-robed youth who bore a black sheath on his back – Ji Ning.

The many globe-shaped illusions represented the true shape of this Daoguard Tower. It was a spacetime maze!

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After blinking into the Daoguard Tower, Ning saw a brand new world appear before him. He was within a dark-red cave that was merely a million kilometers in size. This region was covered with countless flowing runes that brimmed with fiery energy. There was nothing within this region save for Ning himself.

“Up, down, left, right, forwards, backwards...” Ning stood there in midair, scanning his surroundings. He could vaguely sense that this region was connected to six other spacetime continuums.

“It doesn’t seem to matter which direction I choose.” At Ning’s level, his premonitions were extremely accurate. In truth, these ‘senses’ were a reflection of the whispers of the Chaosverse itself. Ning truly was blessed and doted upon by the prime essences of the Chaosverse, and so his senses were extremely keen. Even here in a spacetime maze, his senses would help tell him which was the best path to take.

Rumble... suddenly, all of the mystic runes within this region of one million kilometers began to flare up, producing dark-red flames that swarmed the region as they flew towards Ning. Ning was surrounded by his Sword Dao Domain, but the flames were omnipresent.

“What powerful flames.” Ning drew a Northbow sword. Sword-light spun out as he poured his divine power into his sword, using the Earth Sword Dao. It formed a triple layer of rippling yellow energy which surrounded him and protected him. The flames blazed away against him, but the earthen yellow energy simply rippled slightly while managing to endure.

Of Ning’s many Daos, the Earth Sword Dao was the best suited for dealing with these corrosive dark-red flames. However, its power would quickly be used up at an alarming rate. Most likely, it would be consumed within ten seconds.

“These flames are incredibly powerful. I imagine even the Blazesun Ruler would be roasted to death by them.” Ning quickly began to inspect this spacetime continuum in detail. However, it took him three strikes

with his sword to defend against the flames before he was able to locate the critical points to this spacetime continuum.

Boom! Boom! Ning began to furiously attack using his Space Sword Dao. His first sword scissored through space like paper, doing the groundwork necessary to allow his second sword to tear through this spacetime continuum.

Whoosh! A giant gaping hole in spacetime appeared. Ning immediately darted into it, then stared at the void before him.

Ning raised his head to glance at the 'skies'. These spacetime continuums all seemed to be globe-shaped, and the spacetime globes were all linked together. There were dimensional seams between them as well, and Ning was within one of those seams. As he flew through the seams, he carefully inspected the area around him, but in the end was only able to discover a total of four spacetime continuums. Everything else was completely blocked off by these four.

"So if I wish to advance, I have to enter one of these four?" Ning hesitated. Suddenly... crack! A bolt of lightning shot out from one of the nearby spacetime continuums, striking towards Ning and forcing him to use his Lightning Sword Dao to defend.

"Daolord Darknorth, even if you don't enter my maze you'll still die," a cold voice rang out.

Ning quickly understood that Hegemons were using treasures within the Daoguard Tower to assault him! If he entered one of the continuums, he would have to face the dangers inherent to each continuum. If he remained outside, he would be ambushed and assaulted by the Hegemons and Emperors.

Ning glanced at the spacetime around him. "What a formidable formation." Swoosh! Ning drilled into one of the spacetime continuums, flying inside. The spacetime membrane didn't block his path, allowing him to enter with ease.

This particular continuum was one filled with a boundless howling wind which felt as sharp as daggers. The wind cut everything within the

continuum to ribbons, and Ning was forced to use his Water Sword Dao to defend.

.....

Danger was everywhere. Death was omnipresent. Ning's only choice was to defend while searching for ways to defeat the mechanisms inherent to each continuum! It must be remembered that within this spacetime maze, every single spacetime continuum contained a powerful offensive formation. As a result, they weren't exceptionally stable. These Daoguard Towers weren't built to trap foes; if trapping the foe was the goal, the Sacred Realm and Purgatory was more than enough. They existed to actively kill enemies!

Alas, they were invaders into this Chaosverse. As a result, Sithe Daoguard Towers were only able to draw upon the energy provided by the local generator they had set up. There was a limit to how much power they could draw. Back in their own homeland, they could draw upon the power of the entire Chaosverse. Only then would they be at peak power! Every single spacetime continuum would become dramatically more powerful. Even Autarchs would be attritioned to death.

As for now? It would be hard for this Daoguard Tower to slay an Autarch, but it could certainly trap one for an extended period of time. As for killing a Daolord whose lifespan was limited... Bowenya felt certain that it would be quite easy.

"This one here." Ning broke out of another spacetime continuum, following his premonitions and advancing without hesitation towards a brand-new continuum.

His senses wouldn't deceive him. This was definitely the path which led him closest to where he needed to go. If he followed this path, he would definitely be able to reach the core of this Daoguard Tower!

"Hahaha! Daolord Darknorth, if my count is correct, you've already attacked more than fifty times." Exalt Bowenya's voice echoed within this mist-filled continuum. "As expected of the first master of an Eternal Omega Dao in this Chaosverse. You truly are impressive, and your senses

truly are sharp! Even in a spacetime maze, you are able to find the best path available.”

Ning completely ignored him, choosing to instead focus on analyzing the new region he was in. He wanted to find the center of this tower, then assault it with all his power. His strikes against it would be far more effective than his strikes anywhere else; two or three strikes would be enough to grant him escape.

“But even if you can find the best path, it’ll be of no use. You’ll die of exhaustion before you ever reach it.” Exalt Bowenya roared with laughter. “Let me tell you a little secret. You are still at the outer edges of the spacetime maze. You aren’t even close to me yet!”

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RWX's Thoughts

First time posting this on the new system. I'm nervous, even though it's mine! Hope I got it right. Past few days have been murder as we have been overhauling things. Thanks for being fans and your continued support!

Chapter 17: The Epiphany Within the Spacetime Maze

The Five Truncheon Chapters, Chapter 17 – The Epiphany Within the Spacetime Maze

Ji Ning did in fact feel anxious. He could sense that although he had indeed chosen the quickest path, the journey before him would be a long one and he would need to traverse over a thousand different spacetime continuums.

He had to strike at least four or five times within each spacetime continuum to break free. Some cost him seven or eight strikes! He had only been fighting for a short while but had already struck over fifty times. This was rapidly depleting his lifespan! Although Ning had expected that this would be dangerous, there was nothing he could do upon being trapped within the spacetime maze.

“I didn’t have to use full power on each strike, but I really don’t have many strikes left in me. My truesoul is crumbling faster and faster now. I can’t predict when the final collapse will come.” Ning was worried. More and more cracks had appeared upon his truesoul, hastening the day when it all came crashing down. These cracks were accumulating at an alarming rate!

Ning’s lifespan was rapidly decreasing, but he didn’t slow down in the slightest. He wouldn’t give up until the last moment came.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Ning was within a world of rain. His sword-light cut a hole into the world, allowing him to flee this spacetime continuum.

He had always been charging forwards fearlessly, but suddenly he came to a halt and turned backwards to look into the rain.

For some strange reason... perhaps because he knew he was about to die... when Ning saw the rain, he couldn’t help but think back to his father and mother. His father had personally taught him the [Raindrop Sutra] sword-arts. Later on, Ning had then understood the True Meaning of the

Raindrop and embarked upon the path of the Dao...

Whoosh. The giant gaping hole behind him began to rapidly close as spacetime reached out to merge together and seal the breach. The hole began to shrink in size, and he was able to see less and less of the rain behind him.

Suddenly, Ning's entire body froze. When he saw how spacetime reached out to 'heal' that wound, he suddenly had the feeling that spacetime had a type of life and vitality of its own, as though it was a living being that was struggling to grow, develop, and heal.

"Spacetime." Ning stood there, an epiphany going off in his mind that illuminated his thoughts.

Exalt Bowenya frowned from his position at the very center of the Daoguard Tower as he stared at the small, illusory figure who stood within one of many illusory globes before him. "Why did Daolord Darknorth suddenly come to a halt in the dimensional seams? Hmph. Does he really think he'll last longer if he doesn't go into the next spacetime continuum?"

"Fuze, attack Daolord Darknorth," Exalt Bowenya instructed.

"Understood." Upon hearing the order, a Sithe Emperor who was lying in wait within the dimensional seams of the spacetime maze immediately prepared to launch an attack with the treasures within the Daoguard tower that had been assigned to him.

.....

Ning was in the middle of a prajna-state of epiphany. When you were weak, you might be unable to control yourself upon entering such a state. In fact, you might even forget the entire world around you, including any danger you were in.

Ning, however, had reached an Autarch's level of insight. Even though he was in a prajna-state, he was able to remain somewhat aware of his surroundings.. He first accelerated time by 100x around him, then carefully continued his meditations.

Not just him; even the black-robed Primaltwin in the outside world had also entered a prajna-state.

Swish! A streak of black wind howled straight towards Ning. The meditating Ning was able to divert a bit of his attention to dealing with it, using the Water Sword Dao to form a curtain of water which protected and surrounded him.

“He’s still not leaving?” Exalt Bowenya was able to watch everything from afar. When he saw that Ning remained within the dimensional seams, he immediately ordered: “Continue. Do not stop! Since he has chosen to remain within the seams, bombard him with attacks until he dies.”

The black wind attacked again and again, but Ning continued to stand there without moving. If he entered a new spacetime continuum, he would have to deal with incessant attacks which would come from every direction. This black wind, however, was only able to attack roughly once every five seconds. Each time Ning used his sword-arts, he would be able to defend for roughly twenty seconds! During this period of time, Ning kept himself at an 100x temporal rate while continuing to maintain his prajna-state.

Time continued to flow on. After Ning executed the eighteenth stance from his sword-arts, his eyes suddenly lit up.

“Spacetime is alive and sentient in its own way. So this is the Spacetime Sword Dao!” Ning’s heart was filled with joy.

If he had been forced to just sit in the outside world and quietly ponder the mysteries of spacetime, it truly would have taken him over ten thousand chaos cycles to understand all of this! But he was in a life-and-death state in a region where spacetime had been manipulated to an unbelievable degree. Thanks to his mastery of the Space Sword Dao and the many insights it had brought, Ning had also come to understand some of the mysteries behind this spacetime maze, which had been developed by the Sithe Lord of Chaos and was incredibly profound and abstruse.

All of this had resulted in Ning entering a prajna-state, and in doing so

he had shattered through all the obstacles in his path, allowing him to break through to the next level. Oftentimes, aeons of normal cultivation wouldn't be as effective as a single moment of epiphany.

It had been a long, long time since Ning had entered a prajna-state. Generally speaking, the higher a level of insight you reached, the harder it would be for you to truly enter such a state. Back when he was young and living in the Three Realms, he had entered this state on multiple occasions. However, ever since he had become the incredible Daolord Darknorth, master of the Eternal Omega Sword Dao, he had never entered this type of state again. Although he gained the occasional insight, those were not true epiphanies.

But this time... Ning had a true epiphany!

"It seems that I, Darknorth, am not destined to die in this place. Nor are Mistress and the others." Ning revealed a smile, unable to disguise his excitement. If the Paragon of Pills had truly died here, he would forever feel ashamed of himself.

.....

Ning suddenly flew into one of the nearby spacetime continuums.

"I thought he'd just stay there for quite some time." Exalt Bowenya smiled coldly. "This is my Daoguard Tower and my spacetime maze. He can do nothing save passively endure attacks from within my spacetime continuums, and in the end he shall die."

Within the new spacetime continuum. Everything was blurry and indistinct in this region, but the air was filled with many flowing runes that brimmed with electric power.

Ning raised his head to glance at the runes. Given his mastery over the Spacetime Sword Dao, a single glance was all it took for him to discover the secrets behind how the lightning formation was connected to this spacetime continuum.

Rumble... Ning's Sword Dao Domain spread out, quickly covering every inch of this spacetime continuum. It even reached out to penetrate

spacetime itself, disrupting the lightning runes and bringing the power flowing through them to a sluggish halt. Both the lightning formation and the spacetime continuum were disrupted, making it extremely difficult for them to draw upon the power of the Daoguard Tower and then release it.

Previously, Ning's only choice was to passively endure the hits while searching for the critical points in each continuum, then breaking through them. This time, he had twisted spacetime itself to disrupt the local formations. This was a testament to how much control over spacetime the Spacetime Sword Dao granted him.

"This spacetime continuum..." Ning inspected it carefully. He was able to instantly see that there were a total of 360 nodes here, but it would take him time and careful analysis to figure out a way to break through them without using any of his own power at all.

"Daolord Darknorth... what have you done? What have you done?!" Exalt Bowenya's enraged and panicked voice rang out from far away.

How could he not be angry? He was in control of the entire Daoguard Tower, and as a result he could instantly sense that the spacetime continuum Ning was in was now unable to draw upon the power of his Daoguard Tower and no longer attacked Ning!

How had this happened? Why did the attacks come to halt? He didn't understand!

"Could it be that he is incredibly talented in the Dao of Formations and was able to deconstruct the lightning formation?" Exalt Bowenya was puzzled. "But these are all top-tier formations. Even Autarchs would find it extremely hard to breach them."

But of course, he had no idea that Ning hadn't actually deconstructed the formation itself; rather, he had severed the connection between the formation and the local spacetime continuum. Now that the formation was severed from its power source, it was naturally unable to launch any attacks.

"Daolord Darknorth..."

“Daolord Darknorth!” Exalt Bowenya shouted repeatedly.

Ning completely ignored the Exalt’s rants as he continued to carefully analyze the local spacetime continuum. There were now fewer and fewer runes before him, awaiting his analysis. He was already able to merely use his Sword Dao Domain to deconstruct this spacetime continuum, but he continued his studies because he wanted to learn how to best deconstruct the other continuums as well.

All of these spacetime continuums had to share certain commonalities. The more he researched one of them, the easier it would be for him to understand the others.

Finally, however, Exalt Bowenya was no longer able to hold back. “Destroy!” Whoosh. The spacetime continuum Ning was in finally began to break apart. Exalt Bowenya was in complete control over this entire spacetime maze, and as a result was able to create and destroy new spacetime continuums as he saw fit.

“Eh?” Ning blinked, then chuckled. “Exalt Bowenya... since you are so impatient, I’ll hurry it up a little. I’ll be seeing you soon.” As he spoke he began to fly forwards, expanding his Sword Dao Domain as he flew. His domain quickly expanded to the point where it pushed against the surrounding spacetime continuums, which Ning glanced at with a relaxed smile on his face. “Every continuum within this spacetime maze is pretty much constructed in the same manner.”

Just two seconds later, Ning had completely taken over and destroyed the five spacetime continuums around him, while his Sword Dao Domain expanded to an even greater size.

Chapter 18: Iyerre

When Exalt Bowenya saw this, he felt as though a bucket of cold ice had just been dumped over his head. He was completely stunned, shaken, and stupefied.

As a Sithe Exalt, he instantly knew what the scene in front of him represented! Daolord Darknorth had been surrounded by five spacetime continuums, but he had been able to simultaneously destroy all five of them in two seconds. Clearly, the spacetime maze was no longer any danger to him at all, as he was able to easily see through the mysteries of spacetime they employed.

“I’m finished.” Exalt Bowenya’s face turned ugly. “Thankfully, I still have a bit of time left. The closest path to me will still require him to pass nearly a thousand spacetime continuums. It’ll take him a while to get here.” Bowenya began to frantically consider what options were available to him.

“Obey my orders!” Exalt Bowenya immediately began to issue new orders: “All Hegemons and Emperors, attack Daolord Darknorth’s position with everything you have. I’ll give you his exact location.”

“Understood.”

“Understood.” The various Hegemons and Emperors all acknowledged his orders. As for Exalt Bowenya, he took control over some of the Daoguard Tower’s treasures and used them to assault Ning, who was still surrounded by countless spacetime continuums.

Now that the spacetime maze was no longer of any threat to Ning, Bowenya’s only choice was to use his Emperors and the Daoguard Tower’s own treasures to attack him.

Boom! Whoosh! Slash! All sorts of attacks rained down upon Ning from every direction, passing through various spacetime continuums. Exalt Bowenya remained in full control of spacetime here, and thus he was able to make it so that the various continuums allowed attacks to pass through them without impediment.

Ning stood there without moving, his Sword Dao Domain active around him. He was able to use it to sense how spacetime was operating around him, and in doing so he was able to quickly dissolve the various continuums his domain touched. This time, he was actually a bit faster than previously. Every single continuum was deconstructed with ease.

What he needed to do was to get a clear picture of how each of the continuums operated. Upon doing so, he would be able to deconstruct them!

“Eh?” Ning suddenly felt a premonition that dangerous attacks were raining down towards him from every direction. “What’s with all these attacks?”

The Hegemons and Emperors were all scattered throughout the Daoguard Tower, which was why prior to this Ning had only had to deal with a single attack each time. Now that Exalt Bowenya had abandoned using the spacetime maze to trap Ning, all of the Emperors were attacking at the same time.

Some were so very far away that their attacks had to fly through spacetime for an extremely long period of time before reaching Ning, who was able to use his Illusion Sword Dao to dodge the vast majority of them. The only ones which were dangerous were the ones coming from nearby Hegemons and Emperors who were attacking from close range. The ones who were just ten or twenty million kilometers away were especially dangerous.

Whoosh. Ning was forced to use his Water Sword Dao to defend. His Sword Dao Domain was currently only able to expand to a maximum of eight million kilometers, and so these attacks were able to easily saturate this entire region with attacks.

Pop! Pop! More surrounding spacetime continuums were destroyed, with Ning continuing to deconstruct them faster and faster.

“Daolord Darknorth!” A voice rang out from afar. “I know that we are going to lose this battle. My only request is that you spare the countless mortals who live within our homeland. Give them a chance to survive!”

“Boundless, how dare you betray me! Attack! Attack and kill Daolord Darknorth!” Exalt Bowenya screamed frantically.

“Boundless... why even bother with him?” Angry, desperate, and grief-filled voices rang out. These came from the other Hegemons and Emperors within the Daoguard Tower, and the rain of attacks pouring down upon Ning began to slow down.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Just four seconds later, Ning was able to destroy four more continuums towards his left. He instantly saw the Hegemon known as ‘boundless’ who was controlling treasures from the dimensional seam beyond those continuums. He was looking at Ning, a pleading look in his eyes... and his aura was rapidly weakening.

His truesoul was breaking apart. Even his body began to break apart and decompose.

It must be remembered that these Hegemons and Emperors had all sworn lifeblood oaths to obey Exalt Bowenya’s orders! Exalt Bowenya had ordered all of them to attack Ning. If they were perhaps a bit slow while they attacked or took it easy on Ning, that would be one thing... but if they suddenly and completely halted all of their attacks, that would constitute a violation of orders and therefore a violation of their oaths. They would be punished for it.

They had all sworn oaths with extremely heavy consequences. As a result, every strand of truesoul within Boundless’ body was breaking apart, as his body itself began to crumble and break apart as well.

“Brother Boundless.”

“Boundless.”

Many voices rang out. Quite a few of the Hegemons and Emperors present were Sithe descendants, and they all felt grief. Clearly, Hegemon Boundless had many friends amongst their ranks.

Ning gazed at Hegemon Boundless, who continued to stare at Ning with a pleading expression even as his body broke apart. Ning couldn’t help but let out a sigh. Why?

The Sithe descendants... they felt much more love and attachment towards this hidden dimension than the true Sithe did, as this was the place they were born and bred. They had lived here for countless aeons, and they were willing to die for the sake of their homes. Now that they had no further hopes of defeating Ning in battle, their only choice was to beg him.

“When I captured the other Hegemons and Emperors, I promised long ago that I would not destroy your homeland. There’s no need for you to worry.” Ning’s voice echoed throughout the Daoguard Tower as he continued to destroy the spacetime continuums surrounding him. By now, it took him less than a second for each ‘cycle’ of destruction. Ning could as easily deconstruct nine or ten continuums simultaneously as he could two or three. There was no real difference. Anything he could ‘see’ through his Sword Dao Domain, he could deconstruct.

“Farewell, Brother Boundless.”

“Brother Boundless.”

Some of the Emperors and Hegemons began to dramatically slow down their attack rates. They were bound by their oaths to continue attacking, but now they were just doing the bare minimum necessary.

Ning’s Sword Dao Domain continued to expand, reaching ten million kilometers, twenty million kilometers, and more. It gradually began to encompass some of the nearby Hegemons and Emperors, who Ning captured and transferred into his estate-world. Almost none of the descendants fought back; in fact, most were quite calm. The true Sithe, however, resisted fiercely, unwilling to give up.

Ning could sense the deep feelings the Sithe descendants had towards their home. This caused him to feel a sense of admiration towards them, but it also increased his distaste of Bowenya. Bowenya truly didn’t treat these people as living beings at all!

Rumble... the Sword Dao Domain continued to rapidly expand in every direction, destroying more and more spacetime continuums as Ning moved closer to the heart of the Daoguard Tower.

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Within the dark room inside the heart of the Daoguard Tower. The giant formation-base millstone continued to slowly swivel, and next to it were three other formation-base millstones of varying sizes which were swiveling slightly faster and the big one.

Bowenya flew over to the smallest millstone. This one was merely three meters long and it was semi-translucent.

“Focus.” Bowenya took control over that millstone, pouring the power of his Daoguard Tower inside it.

Rumble... a pillar of blurry light instantly appeared above the semi-translucent millstone. The pillar of light slowly began to resonate with another distant location. Finally, a blurry humanoid figure began to appear in the middle of the light. The figure slowly began to solidify further, resolving into a barefoot, gray-robed man who had a benevolent smile on his face, one which seemed to whisper of the pity he felt for the plight of mortals. He was dressed in loose robes and was balding, but his body was extremely muscular. His eyes contained a strange, irresistible magnetism, as though anyone who stared into his eyes would be forever trapped within them. Not even Exalt Bowenya would dare to stare this man in the eye.

“Almighty Iyerre!” Exalt Bowenya bowed reverently.

The respect he showed came from every fiber of his being. He was like a servant in the presence of the master.

“Bowenya, why have you contacted me directly?” The tall, balding, barefoot Iyerre cast his gaze across spacetime to stare at Bowenya. Bowenya felt both embarrassed and terrified, and as a result his voice became even more respectful: “Almighty Iyerre, I have discovered that this Chaosverse has given birth to a Daolord who controls an Eternal Omega Dao.”

“An Eternal Omega Dao? Yes, I’ve heard of this as well. His name is ‘Daolord Darknorth’, I believe. His name has been spread throughout this entire Chaosverse. My servants have notified me of this long ago,” Iyerre

said calmly.

“He is currently within the dimension I control. In fact, he’s right here inside my Daoguard Tower!” Bowenya said hurriedly.

Iyerre’s eyes suddenly shone with dazzling light. He wanted very much to kill Daolord Darknorth, but he knew that the man would be able to summon Autarchs to assist him. Killing him anywhere in this Chaosverse would be extremely difficult. Iyerre was the supreme commander of the Sithe forces here, and his goal was to take over this entire Chaosverse. It was important that the local cultivators not even know of his existence.

Thus, all high-ranking Sithe had been forced to swear oaths not to divulge his presence! As a result, neither Ning nor the Autarchs even knew of Iyerre’s existence.

“Have you killed him?” Iyerre asked.

“I have not. He’s already solved my spacetime maze and will reach the heart of my Daoguard Tower soon,” Bowenya said hurriedly. “I’m no match for him at all.”

Chapter 19: Descent

“He’s solved the spacetime maze?” Iyerre hesitated slightly, then said in a calm voice, “I’ll send an Apocalypse-class servitor over. Remember, you must not reveal any traces of my existence.”

A hidden weapon was only effective when it remained hidden. Once his presence was revealed, the cultivators would be on their guard against him, which would drastically weaken the impact he might have. During the previous Dawn War, Iyerre could tell that the situation was unfavorable for them. Even if he led his forces in a final attack, they would at most be able to cause the cultivators to suffer heavy losses. Victory would still elude them... and so he instead chose to hide, waiting for a better opportunity.

He was a very patient man! There was no way he would be willing to risk exposing himself merely to kill Daolord Darknorth.

“I understand,” Bowenya said respectfully. Sharp light flickered in his eyes. He had sacrificed too much in his efforts to kill this damnable Daolord Darknorth.

“An Apocalypse-class servitor... hmph. Those are some of the most powerful servants under almighty Iyerre’s control.” Bowenya was filled with eagerness. “This time, we’ll definitely be able to kill you, even if we have to simply attrition you to death.”

He had previously used an ‘Apocalypse-class’ castle and formation against Ning. In truth, Apocalypse-class simply represented an overall level of power. Apocalypse-class servitors, however, were actual living beings. Every single attack they launched was comparable to the power of an Apocalypse-class treasure, making them far more deadly than the treasures themselves.

.....

Rumble...

Deep within the spacetime maze. Ning stood there at the center of the

maze, his Sword Dao Domain continuing to furiously expand as he ‘popped’ the various spacetime continuums and destroyed them. Each continuum was only able to last a single second in the face of Ning’s might, and just a short while later his Sword Dao Domain had already stretched out to encompass a hundred million kilometers.

“We’ve lost.”

“I really can’t accept this.”

“Who would’ve thought that after surviving the last great war in this Chaosverse, we’d end up dying here?” The true Sithe Hegemons were filled with despair as the Sword Dao Domain reached out to encompass them. They were captured without being able to fight back at all.

Ning continued to furiously expand his Sword Dao Domain as he moved closer and closer towards the center of the Daoguard Tower. Suddenly...

“Daolord Darknorth, I’m truly impressed. You were actually able to solve my spacetime maze. Not even my Daoguard Tower can suppress you! Heh. Still... since I know that I’ve lost this battle, I’m not going to stay here any longer. Before leaving, I’m going to give you one final gift.” Bowenya’s voice rang out from afar.

“Exalt, take us with you!”

“Exalt, save us!” Instantly, some Hegemons and Emperors began to beg for rescue. This hidden dimension was able to capture enemies from afar; naturally, it was also able to allow Exalt Bowenya free passage in escaping.

“As far as Bowenya is concerned, his life is the only life that matters. He won’t care about whether the rest of you survive or not, much less whether this dimension will survive,” Ning said coldly as he continued to furiously break apart the various spacetime continuums. However, it would still take him hundreds of seconds to reach the core of this tower. He simply didn’t have enough time to stop Exalt Bowenya from leaving.

“My final gift to you is the most terrifying of the many creatures which have been kept suppressed within this hidden dimension. If you can survive it, you’ll be able to leave this place. I, however, won’t be staying to

watch,” Bowenya called out.

Rumble... a deep thrumming sound pervaded the entire Daoguard Tower as dimensional ripples spread out.

“He left?” Ning was quickly able to ascertain that Exalt Bowenya had indeed fled.

“Damnit.”

“Bowenya!”

“Bowenya, why couldn’t you take us with you?” Many Hegemons and Emperors were cursing at him.

.....

Within the core of the Daoguard Tower. An enormous hand tore through space, ripping open a dark dimensional tunnel that led straight to the core. A giant tree suddenly came flying out from that dimensional tunnel! This giant tree was covered with countless branches and leaves, and the main trunk had a single giant eye on it. When it flew out of the black passageway, it gave Bowenya a cold glance.

Bowenya said, “I’ll leave the rest up to you.” He quickly fled into the dimensional tunnel.

Although this Exalt-class Daoguard Tower did indeed hold other creatures within it, those were all insane prisoners. How could he possibly have an Apocalypse-class servitor with him? These powerful beings always followed by Iyerre’s side.

“Mm.” The giant tree grunted, watching as Bowenya disappeared within the darkness of the tunnel. The tree was now in charge of protecting the core of this entire Daoguard Tower, and it quickly took control of it as the tunnel behind it vanished.

Whoooosh. Its countless branches all stretched out, extending out of the central room and towards the outside world as its countless branches grew longer and thicker. It must be understood that this creature had lived in the Infinite Void prior to being captured and tamed by Iyerre. Its true form

was as vast as any celestial object! Its current form was just a miniaturized version of itself.

The spacetime maze was quite enormous. Ning had only dealt with a small portion of it. The branches quickly extended outside the Daoguard Tower, then began to twist themselves around it. As soon as they exited the Daoguard Tower, the branches began to rapidly expand in size, with each branch coiling around the tower like a titanic python. The entire Daoguard Tower was almost instantly surrounded by a cocoon of countless leafy branches. The branches covered every single inch of the Daoguard Tower in a tight embrace.

Next, the branches began to extend in every other direction, including both the Sacred Mountains, the skies, and the depths of the earth. They continued to furiously expand in size, snaking out longer and longer. After just ten seconds, the branches had filled every inch of the entire Sacred Realm, completely covering every inch of it.

.....

Within the Daoguard Tower. As soon as the giant tree completely covered the Daoguard Hall, it began to attack Ning as well.

“Eh?” Ning turned pale. He could subconsciously sense that something incredibly dangerous was happening. Moments later, a series of enormous black branches shot through the air and entered the range of his Sword Dao Domain.

“Illusion Sword Dao!” Ning kept his illusory realm active, hiding the location of his true body.

“Daolord Darknorth, mm? Do you think you can hide from me?” A sonorous voice boomed out as a large number of twisting veins appeared on the surface of every single branch. The countless branches began to sweep through every inch of the Sword Dao Domain. There were simply too many of them, while Ning’s domain was merely a hundred million kilometers in size. There was nowhere for him to hide.

“Break!” The Northbow sword in Ning’s hand suddenly flashed with light. Crack! Twelve branches were instantly severed by this blow. It

seemed as though this creature was actually more fragile than the other creatures Ning had encountered.

Still, Ning's face remained quite somber. There were simply too many of these branching tendrils, and the ones he severed began to quickly regrow.

Whoosh. Whoosh. The branches quickly managed to locate where Ning was, then began to lash out at him with abandon. Each strike was just as powerful as the strikes from the first beast Ning had encountered.

What he didn't know was that while this Apocalypse-class creature's attacks weren't all that strong, it was extremely difficult to actually get rid of and defeat. Iyerre had sent this servant because it was a perfect counter for Ning, whose truesoul was already crumbling away. The goal was to kill him through attrition.

"There are too many branches. I can't get rid of them." Ning was forced to strike eight times in a row, seeking to carve an escape path for himself, but each time new branches would spring up to cover the ones he had destroyed. Worse, Ning had the vague feeling that there were even more branches waiting for their turn!

"How could this Daoguard Tower have such an irritating creature within it?" Ning's face was grim. If he was an Autarch, he could continue to attack with abandon, unleashing thousands of full-strength blows in an extremely short period of time. But he didn't have much time or energy left. At most, he only had a few dozen strikes left in him. There was no way he could escape at all.

Boom! Boom! The branches continued to furiously rain blows upon Ning, who was forced to use the Spacetime Sword Dao to create a tiny miniature spacetime continuum which served as a form of armor which covered him. This was his most powerful defensive technique thus far.

Focusing on defense allowed him to conserve more energy. Attacking consumed it far too quickly.

"Die! DIE!" The countless branches lashed at him like a thousand whips, furiously slamming against the spacetime armor covering Ning. They attacked at such high speed that they were like countless leafy blurs, and

each strike was slightly stronger than a blow from the Blazesun Ruler! Ning continued to fly about and dodge while letting his armor absorb the blows, but just one second later he was forced to once more use his sword-arts to recreate the armor.

His divine power and Immortal energy was depleting at a fast pace, and the cracks in his truesoul were growing larger and larger as the crumbling process accelerated.

“Autarch Mogg, hurry up and deconstruct this hidden dimension!” Ning felt extremely anxious. “I’m not going to be able to hang on for much longer.”

He had been just one step away from success. If he died here, that meant the Paragon of Pills would die here as well! Ning truly couldn’t accept this outcome.

Chapter 20: The Autarchs Arrive

The outside world.

There were three figures located in the dark void outside this hidden dimension. They were the black-robed Ji Ning, the bald, red-robed avatar of Autarch Titanos, and the skinny, black-robed avatar of Autarch Mogg.

Boom! As Bowenya departed from this dimension and the tree-creature arrived, a dimensional ripple suddenly spread outwards.

“A spatial ripple!” Autarch Titanos revealed a look of delight, as did the black-robed Ning. Both of them turned to look at Autarch Mogg.

The black-robed Ning said, “Bowenya probably fled out of the hidden dimension.”

Autarch Mogg’s azure eyes narrowed intently as he stared at the dimensional ripples before him. He said softly, “Yes, I can sense a dimensional tunnel... but it was opened in an extremely careful and intricate way. The ripples are very minute.” The dimensional tunnel had not actually opened up from within the hidden dimension itself. If it had, the ripples would be far greater. This was a passageway created from afar by Iyerre, and the ripples were very subdued as a result.

“I’m being attacked by some sort of strange lifeform. It is incredibly powerful, and I won’t be able to hold on for much longer,” Ning blurted out.

“I’m moving as fast as I can,” Autarch Mogg said.

Fifteen seconds went by. “Found it!” Autarch Mogg’s eyes lit up. Those ripples were minute, but he was still able to use them to lock onto the location of that hidden dimension. Autarch Mogg was the Autarch of the Space Daobirth Essence, after all, and he was in his own Chaosverse. He had every factor on his side, and as a result he was naturally able to locate that dimension.

“Hurry up and open a path into it!” Autarch Titanos urged.

“Alright.” Autarch Mogg drew an extremely slender saber with his right

hand, then gave it a wave. Slash! The space before him was torn open as easily as paper, producing a neat 'wound' in space. This slash tore through multiple layers of different dimensional continuums, reaching all the way towards the hidden dimension which Autarch Mogg and located.

Riiiiip! The slash clashed against the tenacious exterior membrane protecting the hidden continuum.

"There it is." Autarch Mogg blinked in surprise. "The membrane is quite tough. BREAK!" Autarch Mogg instantly manifested a total of six arms. Each of them was grasping an extremely long and slender blade, and he leapt forwards to soar towards the membrane. Thousands of beautiful flowers seemed to bloom before him, with each snowy-white flower being formed from a slash of dimensional saber-light. Autarch Mogg was definitely the paramount expert in chopping apart dimensional membranes, and it took him just a single second to tear through it.

"Impressive." Ning couldn't help but sigh in amazement. He might have his Space Sword Dao, but its power was still fundamentally that of the Dao of the Sword; the Dao of Space was just a supporting Dao. There was no way it could compare to Autarch Mogg's 'Space Daobirth Essence'. Without question, Autarch Mogg's mastery over space was superior to all others within this Chaosverse.

If Autarch Titanos had to assault the dimensional membrane, he would've been forced to tear through it by hammering it repeatedly through brute-force attacks. Autarch Mogg was able to accomplish it much more easily.

"Let's go inside!" Autarch Mogg led Ning into the hidden dimension. As soon as the two avatars and the black-robed Ning entered it, they saw the countless leafy tendrils which completely filled this entire world. There were many places which were completely surrounded by those countless branches! This sight caused even Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos to reveal looks of surprise.

"DIE!" When the great tree saw that outsiders had arrived, it instantly sent countless tendrils sweeping towards them.

“My true body is right in the center of the Daoguard Tower,” Ning said hurriedly.

“Titanos, you take care of Darknorth’s Primaltwin. I’ll go to the Daoguard Tower,” Mogg said.

“Better that we go together. Darknorth’s true body isn’t going to be able to hold on much longer. Darknorth, go inside my estate-world for a short while.” Autarch Titanos waved his hand, sending the black-robed Ning into his estate-world. Ning didn’t try to resist it.

“Attack!” The avatars of Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos drew their weapons and began to fight. Thanks to their mastery over space and karma, they were able to accurately sense the location of the Daoguard Tower, and the two worked together to charge closer and closer towards it.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Autarch Mogg’s six slender sabers chopped through everything within their path. His weapons were like dimensional blades that could chop through all matter, and his strikes actually extended out on a multidimensional level to continue cutting through space itself. His attack speed was absolutely incredible.

“Die.” Autarch Titanos was wearing a set of inky black gloves on all six of his hands, and each glove unleashed boundless mystical power as he struck out towards the opponent. Although his movements seemed much more relaxed, each strike caused countless branches to decay and rot away. In terms of raw damage, he vastly surpassed Autarch Mogg.

“This creature has incredible vitality. Most of these creatures are unable to take more than three palms from me.” Autarch Titanos frowned as he realized how strong this creature’s vital force was.

The two continued to advance at high speed, with black gloves annihilating countless branches on one side and slender sabers chopping through everything on the other. The tree was suffering more and more injuries. It didn’t really care too much about Autarch Mogg’s chops, because it could regrow the parts that had been severed; Autarch Mogg’s attacks weren’t causing too much real damage. Autarch Titanos’ karmic strikes, however, were assaulting its very essence and causing it much

more damage.

“I have to kill him.” The tree was under orders, and it began to fight in an even more frenzied manner. It didn’t have much time left; it had to kill Ning as soon as possible.

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Within the Daoguard Tower.

Countless tough tendrils and branches were continuing to furiously rain blows upon Ning, whose truesoul was crumbling at an extremely fast pace. In order to conserve as much energy as possible, he didn’t launch any counter-attacks and instead focused completely on defense.

Ning’s body was covered by a miniature spacetime cocoon which accompanied him as he fled, dodged, and was occasionally knocked flying. Each time he was struck, he didn’t try to resist the momentum, instead borrowing from it to conserve as much of his own power as possible.

Time continued to flow on. Ning repeatedly used his sword-arts to defend, but each time it resulted in his truesoul crumbling faster and faster.

“Hurry up... hurry up! I can’t hold on much longer.” Ning grew increasingly desperate. “I have nothing left!”

BOOM! An enormous explosion rang out. The countless branches within the Daoguard Tower began to tremble as two figures charged inside the tower.

“No. No! I have to kill this Daolord!” The great tree was already heavily wounded, but it still had a considerable amount of power left. It continued to rain attacks down against Ning while sending many tendrils out to block the two intruders.

Whoosh! Boom! Saber-light flashed while black gloves struck out as Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos unleashed the power of their Daos. In the face of their attacks, these branches seemed unspeakably weak and were destroyed on a large scale.

A snowy-white streak of saber-light suddenly flashed out, severing all the branches and leaves within its path. Some of the branches which were furiously assaulting Ning were severed as well, and Ning could sense that the attacks against him had suddenly lessened. The saber-light was followed by two consecutive strikes from the black gloves, causing the surrounding branches to wither away and rot into nothingness.

Ning finally allowed himself to relax. He landed atop one of the undamaged spacetime bubbles, then sat down and took a deep breath. "Whew." Ning smiled as he looked at Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos. "You finally made it." Ning laughed, and his laughter was very joyful.

They had finally succeeded.

Autarch Titanos' terrifying black gloves finally demolished the great tree's remaining life force. The Daoguard Tower was now completely empty, with just a few remnants of the spacetime maze left behind as well as some terrified Sithe. The great tree had not gone out of its way to slay these Hegemons and Emperors.

"Darknorth." Autarch Titanos and Autarch Mogg both looked at Ning. They quickly turned pale.

Ning's truesoul was crumbling at an incredibly fast rate. It was now so badly cracked that the truesoul itself was shuddering violently, as though it was going to break apart at any moment. If Ning absolutely had to, he might be able to unleash four or five strikes at most... but even if he didn't, the truesoul was still going to completely crumble apart soon.

"As soon as my true body became trapped in here, I knew that my chances of surviving would be slim. I'm happy that I was able to survive as long as I did... and to tell the truth, I benefited greatly from my experiences here," Ning said with a smile.

"You..." Autarch Titanos could sense that Ning's truesoul suddenly began to crumble many times faster than before. Clearly, it was about to completely break apart.

"Oh. Don't be in a rush to kill these Hegemons and Emperors. Many of them are Sithe descendants. They are quite pitiable," Ning said hurriedly.

Chapter 21: Glad You Are Safe

“It doesn’t really matter if we kill them or not. They’re nothing more than foot soldiers,” Autarch Titanos said. “But if we don’t kill them, I recommend that we at least imprison them. We shouldn’t let them escape and reinforce the other Sithe.”

“I understand.” Ning smiled. “There’s something else I’ll need to trouble you two with.”

“Hm?” Autarch Titanos and Autarch Mogg both looked at Ning.

“Please don’t tell the Paragon of Pills and the others about my true body dying here,” Ning said.

Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos blinked. Autarch Titanos said with surprise, “Don’t tell them? You came to the Sithelands for the sake of the Paragon, I believe. They’ll probably be able to guess the truth.”

“Let’s hide it as best we can. Otherwise, they’ll feel guilty about this,” Ning said with a smile. Suddenly, Ning’s gaze grew distant. He murmured softly, “What an odd feeling. So this is what it feels like for my truesoul to crumble...”

Boom! His truesoul completely fell apart. Ning could feel his mind and his thoughts turn sluggish. The entire framework of his truesoul was completely collapsing, like a cracked dike which was falling apart. Countless truesoul fragments spread out in every direction at a pace which was thousands of times faster than before.

So much of his truesoul was breaking apart that it was actually visible to the naked eye. Countless specks of light flew out from Ning as his divine power and Immortal energy both vanished as well.

“Everything... feels... slow. Going... back... to... Chaosverse?” Ning’s sluggish mind could sense that an enormous, warm location was calling towards him. This had to be the Quintessence of the Chaosverse.

Suddenly, Ning’s seated figure lit up like a ball of fire, instantly transforming into countless specks of light that blasted out in every

direction, leaving nothing behind. Ning's body was completely gone. The only things left were his clothes and magic treasures.

Autarch Titanos and Autarch Mogg simply watched silently.

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Within an estate-world. The black-robed Ning was silently standing on his feet. The death of his true body had no impact on his Primaltwin at all, as the two were completely different 'lives'. His Primaltwin would only perish if a powerful foe was able to use a karmic attack to slay the true body and then follow the karmic connection between the two to slay the Primaltwin as well! A normal dissipation, however, wouldn't result in any connected consequences. Ning's Primaltwin continued to slowly disintegrate, but it had yet to engage in any combat since his Daomerge attempt and so the process was still quite slow for it.

"So this is what it feels like for one's truesoul to dissipate?" the black-robed Ning murmured softly.

His true body had died. If his Primaltwin was unable to devise the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique, it would face the same fate. "I have to seize this opportunity." The black-robed Ning's eyes were shining with hope.

"Autarch Titanos, let me out," the black-robed Ning said.

"Very well."

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Within the Daoguard Tower. Ning's true body had dissipated, while the black-robed Ning had appeared next to Autarch Titanos and Autarch Mogg.

"Come." The black-robed Ning waved his hand, summoning his Northbow swords and his other treasures to him. Moments later, his clothes immediately changed as well, going from black to white as he sheathed the Northbow swords on his back once more.

"From this day forth... there is no 'true body' or 'Primaltwin'; just me,"

Ning murmured softly. This was the only life he had.

“Break.” Ning released his awesome Sword Dao Domain, instantly beginning to destroy the few remaining spacetime bubbles of the maze that had trapped him.

The nearby Autarch Mogg chuckled. “Let me give you a hand.” As he spoke, he unleashed an awesome wave of power that swept across the entire region, instantly annihilating the continuum bubbles and destroying them in just two seconds.

Autarch Skyfeeder and Autarch Mogg were most likely superior to all others in this Chaosverse when it came to solving spacetime mazes. One was the master of the Time Daobirth Essence, while the other was the master of the Space Daobirth Essence.

With the various continuum bubbles destroyed, the Hegemons and Emperors who had been scattered throughout the various seams were all revealed.

Some of the Sithe descendants managed to remain quite calm, but the true Sithe were driven to both rage and despair because they knew that Ning would never spare them.

“Daolord Darknorth... you didn’t die?”

“It is all your fault. Why did you have to come here?! We grew tired of the war long ago and were enjoying a peaceful life in this dimension. You had to come and ruin everything!” Some of the true Sithe were howling angrily at Ning.

“My fault?” Ning shook his head. “You know the secrets behind this hidden dimension. Do you really think I would’ve been able to enter on my own? Clearly, it was the controller of this hidden dimension, Bowenya, who forcibly teleported me here.”

The formerly-howling Sithe suddenly fell silent. Right. It had to have been Bowenya who teleported Ning here... but he did so because he wanted to render great merits to the Sithe and be rewarded for it. This was on the standing instructions of the supreme Sithe leader. Who could

blame him?

“You wanted to kill me, so I had to fight back,” Ning said. He then expanded his Sword Dao Domain to cover all of the Hegemons and Emperors.

“Get in here.” He instantly teleported them into his estate-world. Now, the only figures left in the Daoguard Tower were the two Autarchs and Ning.

Next, Ning willed the Paragon of Pills, Hegemon Tia, Hegemon Flameleft, and Lord Annihilation to appear.

“Darknorth.” The Paragon and the others turned to look at the two Autarchs, both of whom radiated auras of ineffable power, then at Ning. Ning’s truesoul was clearly disintegrating at a very, very slow pace. They all revealed looks of delight.

“Respectful greetings, Autarch!” All four of them bowed respectfully.

Autarch Titanos and Autarch Mogg both nodded slightly, but their gazes flickered a little when they glanced at the Paragon of Pills, who Ning clearly cared about deeply. It was for this woman’s sake that Ning had lost his life.

Ning continued to maintain the illusory effect around his Sword Dao Domain, ensuring so that his truesoul appeared to be crumbling faster than it actually was. He didn’t wish for the Paragon of Pills and the others to be able to see any flaws in his pretense.

His Primaltwin had never engaged in battle after the Daomerge, and so its truesoul was crumbling at a pace which was slower than his true body’s prior to his true body entering the Sithelands. This was an obvious problem, and so Ning quickly masked it.

He didn’t wish for the Paragon of Pills to feel too much guilt. He had already accomplished his goal and saved her; there was no point in making her feel guilty about it.

“I’m glad you are safe.” The Paragon of Pills was all smiles.

"I knew that Daolord Darknorth would be able to defeat those Sithe with ease!" Lord Annihilation said flatteringly.

"I was just lucky. I also have to thank these two Autarchs for managing to get here in the nick of time. Otherwise, I would've been in serious trouble," Ning said. "Mistress, since you have realmships you can head off on your own. I have a few things to discuss with the Autarchs."

"Very well." The Paragon and the others all nodded.

"Autarch Mogg, please help send them outside the Sithelands," Ning said.

"That's easy. Let's leave this dimension first." Autarch Mogg sent out a powerful wave of dimensional might which captured all of them. Swish! They instantly reappeared in the black void of space outside.

A surprised look appeared on Ning's face. "We left? As easy as that?"

"When we broke into this place, I went ahead and bound the core of this Daoguard Tower to myself. I can now control it with ease," Autarch Mogg said. "That's why we were able to leave so easily."

"The rest of you can be off now." Autarch Mogg waved his hand, cutting through space with ease. Riiiip! An iridescent dimensional tunnel appeared before him, leading out of the Sithelands.

The Sithelands was quite a dangerous place, after all. Who knew what would happen if they had to fly out? Given how strong the Paragon was, once they made it outside the Sithelands they would definitely be safe.

"Darknorth, I really have to thank you for everything." The Paragon looked at Ning. She felt extremely grateful towards him. Not only had Ning ensured that her three 'brothers' were brought back to life, he had also helped her survive this place, allowing her to reunite with them in person. She had no idea how she was supposed to repay him. Thankfully, Ning didn't suffer any serious injuries during their time in this dangerous dimension. Otherwise, she truly would've been wracked by guilt.

"Off with you. Shoo." Ning smiled at her.

The Paragon of Pills and the others quickly entered the dimensional tunnel and disappeared. Autarch Mogg and Autarch Titanos glanced at each other, then sighed.

Clearly, the Paragon of Pills had no idea that Ning's true body had already died within this hidden dimension. She would probably never know the truth.

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